

'Propaganda' in the Polder

The Dutch government, informing and Polygoon newsreels in the early cold war period, 1945-1956.



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Table of Contents

Terminology & abbreviations	5
<i>'Voorlichting'</i>	5
<i>Abbreviations</i>	5
Introduction	7
<i>Setup</i>	7
<i>Framework & historical context</i>	10
Early cold war in the Netherlands	11
Informing efforts in the Netherlands	12
Newsreels and their importance	14
Chapter 1: Cold War backdrop	18
<i>Letting go of neutrality</i>	18
<i>NATO and Korea</i>	20
<i>Détente and the 'Spirit of Geneva'</i>	21
Chapter 2: Propaganda and informing 1945-1956	24
<i>The challenges of WWII</i>	24
<i>The Regeeringsvoorlichtingsdienst.</i>	24
<i>The committee van Leuven-Goedhart and its repercussions</i>	27
<i>The Hermans Reorganizing committee</i>	29
<i>The end of an 'era'</i>	31
<i>Informing after 1947</i>	31
<i>The new challenge of communism and the BVC</i>	32
<i>The BVC and its work</i>	35
<i>The change in informing</i>	38
Chapter 3: Thoughts on film and newsreels after WWII	40
<i>International development of Newsreels until 1945</i>	40
<i>Film as an important cultural carrier</i>	43
<i>Film and the government</i>	45
<i>The Beheerscommissie and the newsreels</i>	46
<i>The Redactiecommissie</i>	49
<i>The government and Polygoon/Profilti after the war</i>	51
Chapter 4: Polygoon, the editorial committee and their values	52
<i>Personal ties with the government: Gijs van der Wiel and Joop Landré</i>	53
<i>The reach of Newsreels</i>	55
<i>The production process</i>	58
<i>The values of the editorial committee</i>	60
The relationship with the government and the informing value of newsreels	61
National (cultural) value	66
Newsreels as a journalistic medium	69
Chapter 5: Polygoon's views on the international situation and cold war issues.	74
<i>1946-1948, Neutrality</i>	74
<i>1948-1956, NATO and the cold war</i>	75
Chapter 6: The (international) newsreel and the government	83
<i>The importance of the international Newsreel '46-'48</i>	83
<i>The changing importance of the international newsreel '48-'51</i>	86

<i>The international change at the start of the 1950's</i>	88
<i>The BVC and the Newsreel '51-'56</i>	89
<i>Landré vs. the BVC</i>	94
Analysis	98
1945-1948	98
1948-1956	100
<i>Shared values and government influence</i>	102
Further Research	107
Images	109
Sources & Bibliography	111

Terminology & abbreviations

'Voorlichting'

In researching this paper one crucial Dutch word kept coming up: *Voorlichting*. From the *Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst* to rapports on *Overheidsvoorlichting* this word dominates the sphere of government and policy elucidation. Unfortunately, this Dutch word does not have a direct English counterpart. Literally, it means 'to light the way'. In a more figurative form of speaking it means as much as: 'informing [target audience] of [certain matters]', 'providing more information on a certain subject' or 'creating awareness' and is, in this timeframe, almost exclusively used in a governmental context. I will hereafter use 'informing policy' and '(government) informing' as the noun and verb to translate this term. The meaning of the term is closely tied with the controversial term 'propaganda'. In chapter two, the context of what informing meant and how it related to propaganda in the years after the war will be further elucidated

Abbreviations

OKW – *Onderwijs Kunsten en Wetenschap*. Ministry of Education, Arts and Science.

RVD – *Regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst*, later *Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*. Government Information Service.

NBB – *Nederlandse Bioscoopbond*. Dutch Movie Theatre League, a league that acted as a ruling body for movie theater exploiters setting up rules and regulations and overseeing the implementation of these rules.

Polygoon/Profilti - Before the war, the two largest Dutch film production companies, Polygoon (based in Haarlem) and Profilti (based in The Hague) produced newsreels. Before the war and unbeknownst to the employees, Polygoon director Brand Dirk Ochse secretly bought the majority share in Profilti, placing both companies under the same leadership. During the war, both companies were forced to combine their efforts and produced newsreels for the

Germans. After the war, the companies continued their collaboration with each other and divided production. Polygon produced the newsreels and Profilti was in charge of commissioned/scientific movies.

Introduction

Setup

If we look back at the turbulent twentieth century, a great number of images come to mind. From the trenches of Belgium to the first man on the moon and from the atomic bomb to the collapse of the Berlin wall, moving images have inadvertently shaped our perception of history to the point where we associate years of strife, conflict, work and logistics with several iconic images that seem to sum up all of the above. The power of the moving image is so great, that people who were not even alive when these events took place can simple go online to watch them and witness these moments that shaped the course of history. Documentaries using old footage or books using photographs or posters have the ability to capture a person's attention in a way no academic historically accurate work ever could.

The main type of film responsible for these images that help shape national or worldly consciousness and consequently the collective memories of these events was the newsreel.¹ Especially in the pre-television era, this medium was the only source of audiovisual news.² Although newsreels had existed since the early twenties, the medium came to fruition during WWII, when the technical developments in filming and distribution coincided with the necessity of filming the war effort for morale-purposes. Where before WWII the newsreel had been largely used for entertainment purposes, it became obvious during the war that it had enormous propaganda powers. After the war, every country possessing movie theaters showed national and/or international newsreels. Therefore, the following decade can be identified as the heyday of the newsreel in which it acted as the sole bearer of audiovisual news.

This heyday of the powerful medium of the newsreel coincides with a defining period in twentieth-century history: the early cold war. During this period, the world had to deal with the devastating effects and remains of WWII,

¹ Newsreels were short film reels of about 10 minutes filled with (international) news, sports, oddities and other trivia and were shown in cinemas prior to motion pictures or in special cinemas devoted to short films and news.

² Although the pre-television era differs in different parts of the world, we can generally say that this era started with the invention of film camera's and the required projection methods late nineteenth century and gradually ended in the nineteen fifties with the advent of television.

decolonization and the new reality of the two superpowers. These events had radically changed societies and their governments all across the world and their positions in the international arena. Naturally, these events showed up in the newsreels, thus influencing the all-important public opinion. However, *how*, *why*, and *what* events ended up in their respective newsreels is a different case altogether. Because newsreels were the result of an expensive and conscious filming and editing process, because of the impact the newsreels had on the people and because of the limited length of the newsreels these questions become very important.

It is in this light that this paper is framed. This investigation will focus on the cold war informing and propaganda efforts by the Dutch government through the medium of the newsreels, the symbiotic relationship it had with the Dutch newsreel company Polygoon/Profilti and how Polygoon/Profilti perceived their role in making the reels that were known to be influential in people their opinions. However, several fundamental questions in this investigation will have to be answered before we can determine the main questions. These questions can be defined as followed: How did the cold war influence the position of the Netherlands? What were the government's views on informing after the war and how did these change over the decade? How did film and the newsreels fit into these views? What were the considerations made in using the newsreels for informing purposes and how and why did these change over time? How did Polygoon/Profilti view the newsreels and its role in making them? With these questions answered we can look at how the government actually dealt with Polygoon/Profilti and how and why did their relationship changed over the years. What were differences in opinions and values and what were overlapping ones? What factors determined the overlap and differences and general collaboration? With these questions answered, we can come back to the main questions: To what extent did the government use the newsreels made by Polygoon/Profilti for informing purposes in international/cold war matters, to what extent were the newsreels truly independent and what are the underlying explanations for these answers?

The fundamental questions will return in separate chapters. Chapter one will provide the international backdrop and the cold war developments from a Dutch

perspective. Chapter two will focus on government ideas on informing and propaganda and how these changed over the years. Chapter three will give an idea on the nature of newsreels and perception of the importance of film during and right after WWII and the start of government involvement in the newsreel industry. Chapter four will then give a short introduction in the world of the newsreel in the Netherlands and move on to the values and ideas on newsreels present within Polygoon/Profilti. Related to chapter four is chapter five, which deals with Polygoon/Profilti's own perception of its importance regarding (international) politics, their considerations on the cold war reality and their ideas on informing the people on these matters. Finally, chapter six will shed light on the real attempts made by the government to influence the newsreels, especially in the light of the cold war. In the analysis I will answer the main questions and will give an explanation for the government's position, Polygoon's position, the nature of the relationship between the two and the underlying factors that influenced this relationship.

In this case there are several considerations to be taken into account lest the scope of this research becomes even more immense. This investigation will focus on the interplay between governmental and private forces behind Dutch newsreels in the decade between 1945 and 1956 and the considerations that went into incorporating cold war items in the newsreels. It is not a complete history of Polygoon, the company which made the newsreels, nor is it a study of all the propaganda/informing efforts of the government, who's influence in this era virtually reached into all aspects of Dutch society. Neither will I discuss the reception of the newsreels in- or their real influence on society. It is the study of the underlying ideas on propaganda and informing through film in this decade and the real efforts made to realize these ideas.

Furthermore, this particular timeframe has been set for a number of different reasons that require some explanation. Because the scope of this paper is rather dual (newsreels and cold war) the starting-off point of 1945 has been chosen because of its obvious significance in post-war governmental thinking. While we could set this point at 1948 or 1949, the years in which the Netherlands let go of its non-alignment policy and decided to join the western bloc, we need some sort of 'baseline' in order to place the changes in thinking on cold war propaganda.

Also, 1945 marks a new beginning for Polygoon/Profilti as it had to reposition and reinvent itself after the war. The other end of the temporal scope, 1956, has also been chosen for two reasons. First, the advent of television and the first TV-news broadcasts in the Netherlands can be seen as the start of a new era in audiovisual news. While newsreels, due to their technical qualities, still remained qualitatively dominant in the arena of audiovisual news they nevertheless had a hard time competing with this form of daily, more up-to-date form of news. Secondly, the cold war events of 1956 (Suez, Poland, Hungary) provide a cutting-off point for the early cold war as seen from a Dutch perspective. It verified the doubts in Dutch society of the sincerity of the politics of Soviet Peaceful Coexistence and ended the era of the Spirit of Geneva.

In this respect, the 'early cold war' in the Netherlands is used to describe the period between 1945-1956. Even though during the first two to three years the Netherlands did not heavily involve itself in the cold war arena, it operated in an international context in which the cold war *was* shaping the world.

Framework & historical context

Before we can place this investigation in its respective larger framework of the cold war, it is necessary to give a short review on the works that have already been written in three related fields, namely on the early cold war period in the Netherlands, informing efforts in the Netherlands and propaganda/informing efforts in newsreels in the early cold war period.

To be sure, we cannot lose sight of the all-encompassing international nature of the period, which influenced the decision-making process on informing policies, propaganda and newsreels. However, for this investigation this will mostly provide a backdrop for the decision-making processes. For more information and material on the Netherlands in the international/transatlantic setting of the early cold war the collection of essays found in both *Four Centuries of Dutch-American relations 1609-2009* and *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe* provide a very suitable start.³

³ Krabbendam, H., Cornelis A. van Minnen, Giles Scott-Smith eds., *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations 1609-2009* (Middelburg 2009); Scott-Smith, G., Hans Krabbendam eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945-1960* (London 2003).

Early cold war in the Netherlands

The early cold war period in the Netherlands in most of the literature on that era can be divided into three sections: politics (the government and government institutions), defense (the military) and culture (Dutch society).

In the case of the government and cold war issues a very decent starting-off point would be the *Parliamentary History of The Netherlands after 1945* series. These extensive historical narratives deal with *all* the parliamentary issues, debates and discussions for each of the different post-war governments in a national context. These books thus serve quite well as a diving board into further research on the Dutch political situation.⁴

If we look at major non-ministry branches and cold war organizations, we come across three specific cases: the civil defense organization *Bescherming Bevolking* (B.B.), an organization that failed because of its inception as a symbolic organization and consequently its lack of leadership or enthusiasm from the public;⁵ the Dutch secret service, the *Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst* (BVD), which did its best to map out and overtly and covertly counter Dutch communist activities;⁶ and the *Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst* (RVD).

Tied to these accounts of government organizations are the works on Dutch defense efforts in the early NATO period. Besides memoirs and official accounts of branches of the military⁷ a leap into early cold war historiography was made right after the cold war ended. In this reflection on the fifties several scholars describe important cold war issues in the Netherlands in the fifties in a military-diplomatic context and found that even though the cold war did affect the Dutch, it did not do so to the extent that national priorities lost their predominance in

⁴ Parts 1-6 deal with the period 1945-1958.

⁵ Bart van der Boom, 'Oorlogsangst in Nederland' in *Leidschrift* 16 (No. 1, 2001), 7-34; there 33; Rieke Leenders, *Als de hemel valt. Bescherming Bevolking tussen fantasie en werkelijkheid* (2001 Tilburg).

⁶ Dick van Engelen, *Frontdienst, De BVD in de koude oorlog* (Amsterdam 2007), 17, 19, 278. Another recent work on the inner workings of the BVD is Frits Hoekstra's *De Dienst, de BVD van binnenuit* (Amsterdam 2012). Both accounts were written by former BVD employees, although the former work was government sanctioned.

⁷ D.C.L. Schoonoord, *Pugno Pro Patria, De Koninklijke Marine tijdens de Koude Oorlog* (Frankeker 2012) deals with the cold war history Royal Dutch Navy; J. Hoffenaar and B. Schoemaker, *Met de blik naar het oosten, De Koninklijke Landmacht 1945-1990* (Den Haag 1994) and G.J. Felijs, *Einde Oefening, infantrist tijdens de Koude Oorlog* (Arnhem 2002). The latter is a personal account of a career soldier in the Dutch army during the cold war.

the national psyche.⁸ That this twenty-one year old collection of essays is still one of the most important works on the early cold war in the Netherlands is an indication of the lack of progress made in this field.

This national psyche of the fifties is also the topic in the collection of essays by Paul Luykx and Pim Slot. They state that the 'long fifties' were not the 'dull' years that they are made out to be, but rather that they contained and planted the seeds for the societal changes that occurred in the sixties. The book mainly deals with the cultural background of the fifties that is relevant to any research into this era.⁹

Of course several analyses of the early cold war also came out during the cold war. These accounts tended to be either rather leftist critiques of the conformity, pillarization and pro-government stance of most segments of society or focusing on the leftist elements of society.¹⁰ After the cold war ended, more books on the radical left in the fifties popped up, including a large investigation into the Dutch communist party, the C.P.N.¹¹

Informing efforts in the Netherlands

The nature of the Dutch post-war government had changed quite radically compared to the pre-war government. It now had to guide and stabilize Dutch society in a time of extensive rebuilding efforts, colonial actions in Indonesia¹² and a time of international upheaval. In this new international context it had to let go of its axiomatic policy of neutrality and eventually sided with America. In order to convey the accompanying message of policy changes to the public the

⁸ J. Hoffenaar and G. Teitler, eds., *De Koude Oorlog, Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht in de jaren '50* ('s-Gravenhage 1992).

⁹ Paul Luykx and Pim Slot, eds., *Een Stille Revolutie? Cultuur en Mentaliteit in de lange jaren vijftig* (Hilversum 1997). Other books dealing with the same social and cultural issues of the fifties are Hans Oink's *Wat was de vrede mooi toen het nog oorlog was* ('s-Gravenzande 1992) and Joshua Livestro's *De adem van Grootheid, Nederland in de jaren vijftig* (Amsterdam 2006).

¹⁰ Examples are Joost Divendal, Herman de Liagre Böhl, Arnold Koper, Max van Weezel eds., *Nederland, links en de Koude Oorlog, Breuken en Bruggen* (Amsterdam 1982); Max van Weezel; Anet Bleich, *Ga dan zelf naar Siberië! Linkse intellectuelen en de koude oorlog* (Amsterdam 1978); Braun, Marianne, *De regeringscommissie in Finsterwolde, Een bijdrage tot de geschiedschrijving van de Koude Oorlog in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1975).

¹¹ Ger Verrips, *Dwars, Duivels en Dromend, De geschiedenis van de CPN 1938-1991* (Amsterdam 1995).

¹² I will refer to the colonial struggle in the Dutch East Indies as those in Indonesia, in this case, a matter of semantics.

government founded the RVD that was tasked with communicating government messages and policy to the public.

Most of the works on informing efforts during the cold war were in the field of public administration and the role of the information service. These are not limited to overviews of the development of policy, but are also (sanctioned) rapports that discuss the contemporary role, nature and future of the informing policies by the government.¹³

The only historical narrative directly dealing with the RVD, other than short personal accounts by former employees/directors, is Marja Wagenaar's dissertation on the Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst. Her extensive account of the organization covers its inception, the people responsible and the issues and fields in which the organization intervened or was part of. It also extensively deals with the debates about the nature of the service, the messages it was communicating and to whom.¹⁴

When it comes to Dutch anticommunism efforts and the implementation of these in society in the fifties, Paul Koedijk provides two short but apt overviews of some of the main tendencies and changes in these efforts in the fifties, along with several causes therefor. It provides a great start into further investigations of Dutch anticommunist efforts.¹⁵

¹³ An influential post-war government sanctioned rapport was G.J. van Heuven-Goedhart *Overheidsvoorlichting, Rapport der adviescommissie overheidsbeleid inzake voorlichting, ingesteld 6 maart 1946* ('s-Gravenhage 1946); G.A.M. Vogelaar, *Systematiek en spelregels van de overheidsvoorlichting* ('s-Gravenhage 1955); J van der Hulst, *Overheid en volksvoorlichting* (Kampen 1958); on the role of government informing efforts during the seventies H. Schelhaas, *Overheidsvoorlichting en Democratie* ('s-Gravenhage 1976); A general overview of developments would be J. Katus and W.F. Volmer eds., *Ontwikkelingslijnen van de Overheidsvoorlichting* (Muiderberg 1985).

¹⁴ Marja Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst: Geheimhouden, toedekken en openbaren* (Leiden 1997). Personal accounts were written by Gijs van der Wiel and Joop Landré. G. van der Wiel, 'De presentatie van het regeringsbeleid 1945-1989', in J. TH. J. Van den Berg, H.M. Bleich, A. Van Gameren, W.P. Specker, G. Visscher eds., *Tussen Nieuwspoort & Binnenhof, De jaren 60 al breuklijn in de naoorlogse ontwikkelingen in politiek en journalistiek* ('s-Gravenhage 1989), 58-69; Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 'G. van der Wiel, Hoofddirecteur RVD 1968-1982; Niet voor maar met de ministers,' in *Voor de eenheid van beleid, Beschouwingen ter gelegenheid van vijftig jaar Ministerie van Algemene Zaken* ('s-Gravenhage 1987), 276-288. Whereas van der Wiel's accounts provides us with some insight into the workings of the RVD, little can be said of J.M. Landré's anecdotal autobiography *Joop Landré vertelt, een anekdotische biografie* (Cadier en Keer 1994).

¹⁵ Paul Koedijk 'The Netherlands, The United States, and Anticommunism during the early cold war' in *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations 1609-2009* (Middelburg 2009), 597-608; Paul Koedijk 'Van "Vrede en Vrijheid" tot "Volk en Verdediging": veranderingen in anticommunistische psychologische oorlogsvoering in Nederland, 1950-1965' in Schoenmaker,

Finally, Floribert Baudet gives a very clear insight in government informing efforts in the early cold war period, mainly from the perspective of the Dutch armed forces and existing and new thoughts on the military, occupation and national morale. He states that after WWII, a new mode of thinking allowed for new thoughts on informing and propaganda. Through press, radio and film, government informers actively tried to persuade the Dutch public of its international policies and the necessity of a unified country.¹⁶

Newsreels and their importance

Whereas cold war and the Netherlands and informing policies within the Netherlands have received ample and relatively enough attention, the same cannot be said for newsreels. It was understood by contemporaries that film, both movies and newsreels, was a highly influential mass medium.¹⁷ In both media studies and in cold war historiography however, newsreels as a form of communication and influence on public opinion have not yet been extensively investigated.

In the case of America, Shawn J. Perry-Giles and Nathan S. Atkinson ventured in the world of newsreels in a cold war context. Perry-Giles promoted the idea of 'camouflaged propaganda' (where the propaganda purposes of a message are camouflaged to seem objective) and stated that both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations were guilty of this act. Despite laws prohibiting the government from doing so, they utilized the existing ties between (newsreel) journalists, editors and the military that had formed during WWII to propagate certain government campaigns and ideas. He emphasized the importance of

B., J.A.M.M. Jansen eds., *In de Schaduw van de Muur, Maatschappij en krijgsmacht rond 1960* (Den Haag 1997), 57-81.

¹⁶ Floribert Baudet, "'The ideological equivalent of the atomic bomb". The Netherlands, Atlanticism, and human rights in the Early Cold War', in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9 (No. 4, Dec 2011), 269-281; Floribert Baudet, *Het Vierde Wapen, Voorlichting, Propaganda en Volksweerbaarheid, 1944-1953* (Amsterdam 2013).

¹⁷ Examples for this can not only be found in archives, but also in contemporary articles such as William P. Montague, 'Public opinion and the Newsreels' in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 2 (No. 1, jan 1938), 49-53; Dan Doherty, Harry Lawrenson, 'The Newsreel, its production and significance', in *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 47 (No. 5, Nov 1946), 357-375; and Arthur L. Mayer, 'Fact into Film' in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 8 (No. 2, Summer 1944), 206-225. A contemporary report on the power and significance of newsreels was done by UNESCO in 1952: Peter Baechlin and Maurice Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels Across The World* (UNESCO, Paris 1952).

personal ties among the upper echelons of private and government life and the (mis)use of the existing ideas of freedom that were held by the media.¹⁸

Nathan S. Atkinson investigated this claim in the case of the newsreel reporting of the Atomic Bomb tests in the Bikini Atolls. Because of the close connection between newsreel companies and the army, formed by embedded journalists in WWII, the newsreels had a very positive, biased opinion of army operations and information which the army used to promote their own competence. Because of the trust in the army and contemporary notions on photographic realism (where everything you see is a direct and honest representation of reality), the newsreels were largely accepted as being true and fair.¹⁹

In the case of the Netherlands, the newsreels receive little to no attention. They are largely seen as little more than an easy entertainment made by an uncritical company with a “strong governmental character” which had to operate within the confines of the pillarized Dutch society. One article by Chris Vos *does* analyze the newsreels and commissioned films in the early cold war period, but merely sticks to a limited content analysis of several items over a ten-year period. His account, being restricted by poor archival access, offers no real insight as he concludes that the newsreels reflected the broad societal consensus in thinking on the cold war and international realities.²⁰

The only effort made to investigate both government informing policies and newsreels is the work of Gerda Jansen Hendriks. She investigated the newsreels from the Dutch East Indies during the colonial wars and the policies behind the creation of these reels and found that the people responsible did bias the films. Even though the civil servants responsible for the reels did not see it this way,

¹⁸ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “Camouflaged” Propaganda: The Truman and Eisenhower Administration’s Covert Manipulation of News’, in *Western Journal of Communication* 60 (No. 2, Spring 1996), 146-167.

¹⁹ Nathan S. Atkinson, ‘Newsreels as Domestic Propaganda: visual Rhetoric at the Dawn of the Cold War’ in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* (Vol. 14, No. 1, 2011), 69-100.

²⁰ Karel Dibbets, ‘Het taboe van de Nederlandse Filmcultuur, Neutraal in een verzuimd land’, in *Tijdschrift voor Media Geschiedenis* 9 (No. 2 2006), 46-64; and Huub Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000, Beroep, Cultuur en Organisatie* (Amsterdam 2004), 318; Chris Vos, ‘De Reflectie van de Koude Oorlog in de Nederlandse journaal- en opdrachtfilm, 1945-1956’, in *Groniek* 22 (No. 4 Groningen 1989), 21-40, there 25, 27, 38.

she concludes the newsreels were a form of propaganda because of the influence they had on public opinion.²¹

Finally works on the operations of Polygoon/Profilti, the company who was responsible for the majority of newsreels shown in the Netherlands are either limited to narratives on the period up until the end of WWII, are unpublished material discussing the post-war period, are works on the wider context of documentary film or journalism or are biographical documentaries that provide a glance into this world at best.²²

In reviewing these works it becomes clear that there is still a lacuna on the relationship between government and newsreels or the usage of the newsreels in informing efforts. In the literature newsreels hardly receive more than a paragraph that merely explain the “governmental character” of the newsreels and their almost slavish adherence to government items and the royal family. Even in the most extensive account on informing and media in the early cold war, that of Baudet, the interplay between government and the newsreels is restricted to several paragraphs and the conclusion is that the government *did* influence the newsreels. The analyses of the newsreels in this case never really goes deeper than ‘the government influenced the reels through the editorial committee’ and almost no light is shed on the production side or on how the newsreels were *actually* influenced.²³

By looking at the production methods, the considerations in making the newsreels, thoughts on informing the public, propaganda and film, government intervening and the inter-organizational and inter-personal ties between

²¹ Gerda Jansen Hendriks, ‘Not a colonial war’: Dutch film propaganda in the fight against Indonesia, 1945-49, in *Journal of Genocide Research* 14 (no.3-4, 2012), 403-418.

²² Jitze de Haan, *Polygoon spant de kroon. De geschiedenis van filmfabriek Polygoon 1919-1945* (Amsterdam 1995); Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, Hilversum, Collectie Polygoon Jitze de Haan, finding aid 13282, (no box number, box is labeled ‘publicaties, verslagen, knipsels, doos 1’), concept article by Jitze de Haan, ‘De terugkeer van het bioscoopjournaal na de Tweede Wereldoorlog’ (17 maart 1996), 1-7; On the wider context of documentary film: Hogenkamp, B., Bram Kempers, John Kirkpatrick eds., *De Documentaire film, 1945-1965, de bloei van een filmgenre in Nederland* (Rotterdam 2003); for a short journalism context: Huub Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*; there are two documentaries on Polygoon: Wil de Jong, ‘De Wereld van Polygoon’ NOS, 1994 and Erik Fransman and Marion Hilhorst, ‘Waar wij niet zijn is niets te doen’, Een documentaire over Polygoon (1919-1987)’, Het Pakhuys, Amsterdam, 2000.

²³ Huub Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*; Baudet, *Het Vierde Wapen*. To be sure, Baudet does examine the use of commissioned *film* by the government, made by Polygoon/Profilti or their employees, but not the newsreels themselves.

government and private newsreel companies in the context of the early cold war in the Netherlands we can achieve two things. We can gain more insight in the world of the newsreels and its relationship to the government, areas that to this day lack any proper investigation, and add to the slowly growing corpus of Dutch early cold war historiography, a field that has to compete with its more exiting neighboring eras of WWII and the sixties.

My main contribution in both respects lie in the utilization of new sources that I have had access to and which hitherto have not been used in the debates. Hopefully these will shed more light on both the government's side as that of Polygoon.²⁴

²⁴ The new sources are the meetings of the secret *Bijzondere Voorlichtingscommissie* and the meetings of Polygoon's *Redactiecommissie*.

Chapter 1: Cold War backdrop

In the ten years after the war the Netherlands changed from an ambivalent non-aligned country to one of America's truest allies in the worldwide standoff with the Soviet Union and one that was staunchly in favor of 'Atlanticism'.²⁵ The Dutch government backed the U.S. in most of its viewpoints concerning defense in Europe and considered the country to be of the utmost importance to its survival. But this position did not come easily to all Dutchmen and had definitely not been shared by all in the previous decade. Before we look into ideas on informing and film and film policies it is necessary to understand the situation of and changes in international politics and the Dutch position in these matters.

Letting go of neutrality

The end of the war in Europe in many ways concluded decades of thinking on international issues and started a new series of axiomatic ideas. Already during the war discussions were held between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt on the situation after the war and the accompanying 'spheres of influence' in Europe. Where these discussions during the war were held with the same goal in mind, the defeat of Nazi Germany, the end of the war also meant that the *one* underlying and unifying connection between the Allied powers had been lost. After initial attempts to commonly sort out the problems in Europe, it quickly became clear the goals of the U.S. and the S.U. were irreconcilable. As the new superpowers pitted themselves against each other it became apparent for the U.S. that Soviet communism was bent on the destruction of capitalism and the free world. In this light the U.S. decided to do anything in its power to stop this threat to freedom and included these ideas in what became known as the 'Truman Doctrine'. This international struggle, however, did not really reach the Netherlands in the first two years after the war.

²⁵ 'Atlanticism' can be seen as a general course in favor of cross-Atlantic cooperation in military, economic and political spheres.

Although anticommunism had been widespread in Netherlands before the war, the large communist share in wartime resistance groups and the Soviet efforts in fighting Germany had diminished these feelings. This had even led to the largest communist victory in elections as the Communist Party of the Netherlands received 11% of the votes in the 1946 election. Along with this more tolerant view of communism were also some sentiments that were critical of the U.S. Combined with the re-establishment of pillarization and a yearning for peace via the long-standing Dutch tradition of neutrality in international politics these elements ensured a policy of non-alignment in the first two years after the war.²⁶ But as the division within Europe between the Russian and American spheres of influence became clearer this non-alignment policy became harder to maintain. Two major reasons for this division can be seen. On the one hand, starting in 1947, the European Recovery Program was instigated by the U.S. in order to restore European economies by giving billions of dollars to countries in need. On the other hand, communist actions in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1948 and in Berlin later that year definitively swayed public opinion against communism. It is important to note that even though public opinion now was *against* communism, this did not mean it was wholly *in favor* of the U.S. Not only did American culture and mentality not stroke with Dutch culture, but on a more political note there was also quite some resentment at America's policy with regards to Dutch colonial matters, in which it supported the decolonization of Indonesia.²⁷

The international events and tensions of the late forties led to several things. Most important of which were the signing of the Treaty of Brussels, a cooperation pact between five Western European countries in March 1948, and the signing of the NATO treaty in April 1949, ensuring American military and material support. By the time of the signing, no one in Dutch parliament, except for the CPN, questioned the necessity of western collaboration against this

²⁶ Koedijk, 'The Netherlands, The United States, and Anticommunism during the early cold war', 597, 598; H.J. Neuman, 'Aan de voeten van George Kennan' in J. Hoffenaar en G. Teitler, red., *De Koude Oorlog, Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht in de jaren '50* ('s-Gravenhage 1992), 198-213, there 200-201.

²⁷ H.J. Neuman, 'Aan de voeten van George Kennan', 201; P.F. Maas en J.M.M.J. Clerx eds., *Parlementaire Geschiedenis van Nederland na 1945 deel 3, Het kabinet-Drees-van-Schaik 1948-1951 Koude Oorlog, Dekolonisatie en integratie* (Nijmegen 1996), 45, 68.

aggressive communist threat, especially in the light of the destruction left behind from the previous totalitarian aggressor.²⁸

NATO and Korea

At the onset of NATO this communist threat from Dutch perspective was not so much an external military threat by the Soviet Union, but rather an internal threat of a 'fifth column' of Soviet inspired communists within Dutch society. That this threat was perceived as important mainly had to do with the memories of the Dutch national-socialists, who in 1940 had welcomed the Nazi occupiers and collaborated with their rule during the war. However, rebuilding society and restoring the economy through American funds, and thus removing the seeds of discontent could counter this threat of a communist fifth column.²⁹ This gradually changed at the start of 1950 and rapidly accelerated after North Korea invaded the south on 25 June 1950. In the western world the war was seen as a clear sign of Moscow's expansionist policies and the danger of totalitarian communism. The fear of a grand Soviet invasion of Western Europe was now considered a real possibility. As a result of this Western fear the build up of militaries was sped up and several European countries, including the Netherlands, received millions of dollars worth of military equipment from the U.S. In order to accommodate its new role within NATO and western European defense efforts, the Netherlands had to increase their defense spending. Even though this measure went against Prime Minister Drees's major concern of rebuilding the country and the economy, he felt the measure had to be taken in order to maintain the much needed U.S. support and protection. On the same note, Drees felt pressured by America to commit sending troops to Korea in order to 'preserve democracy'.³⁰ Eventually Dutch commitment to Korea was

²⁸ Maas and Clerx, *Parlementaire Geschiedenis deel 3*, 70-74.

²⁹ J. Hoffenaar, 'Hannibal ante portas.' De Russische militaire dreiging en de opbouw van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht' in Hoffenaar, J. and G. Teitler, red., *De Koude Oorlog, Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht in de jaren '50*, 54-69, there 55; J.C.H. Blom, 'Maatschappij en krijgsmacht in de jaren vijftig. Een nabeschouwing', 214-226, there 215-216; Duco Hellema, 'Introduction, The Politics of Asymmetry: The Netherlands and the United States since 1945' in Krabbendam, H., Cornelis A. van Minnen, Giles Scott-Smith eds., *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations 1609-2009*, 579-596, there 583.

³⁰ Ine Megens, 'Bilateral Defence Cooperation in an Atlantic perspective' in Krabbendam, H., Cornelis A. van Minnen, Giles Scott-Smith eds., *Four centuries*, 621-631, there 623; Blom,

limited and only consisted of almost 4000 voluntary troops of the one million troop total.

Détente and the ‘Spirit of Geneva’

Up until 1953 the nature of communism was perceived to be similar to the totalitarian ideology of Nazism. Soviet crimes and actions were placed on similar footing as those of the Nazi’s, and there was a commonly held assumption that any Soviet occupation would be even more ruthless than that of the Nazi’s. Plans were made in case of an invasion, and ranged to such radical plans as evacuating high-level officials and the execution of domestic communists.³¹

But the death of Stalin saw a thaw in international relations. The collective leadership that followed Stalin started a process of liberalization and sought diplomatic solutions to international matters. This policy of rapprochement culminated in the summit in July 1955, when the heads of the four major powers, the U.S., S.U., Britain and France, met in Geneva to discuss matters of world peace and cooperation and general ‘peaceful coexistence’. The new Soviet policies after this conference entailed cultural exchange programs where foreign politicians and prominent cultural figures were invited to the Soviet Union and increased efforts in reaching out to the newly proclaimed non-aligned countries, which nearly all were decolonized or decolonizing countries.

Amongst Dutch government officials this new Soviet policy was met with mixed feelings and skepticism. The new line of *glimlachpolitiek* (‘smiling politics’) was not to be trusted solely on the underlying intentions, as the communists were deemed untrustworthy. Some Dutch politicians even saw the new course of Moscow merely as a new scheme to mask its standing goals to expand its reach. On the other hand, the liberalization and cultural offensive had definitely

‘Maatschappij en krijgsmacht in de jaren vijftig. Een nabeschouwing’, 215-216; J.A. de Moor, ‘Aan de Amerikanen overgeleverd. Nederland, de Verenigde Staten en de oorlog in Korea, 1950-1953’ in *De Koude Oorlog, Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht in de jaren ’50* (’s-Gravenhage 1992), 163-177, there 175-176; Maas and Clerx, *Parlementaire Geschiedenis na 1945 deel 3*, 75, 78-79, 84; van der Boom, ‘Oorlogsangst in Nederland’, 33.

³¹ Baudet, *Het Vierde Wapen*, 87-88; Koedijk, ‘The Netherlands, The United States, and Anticommunism during the early cold war’, 597; Koedijk, ‘Van “Vrede en Vrijheid” tot “Volk en Verdediging”’, 66.

impressed a part of the country and had increased hopes of a relaxation in the international tension.³²

But even though there was a general disbelief in the intentions of the Soviets, there was little consensus in how to deal with this new international situation. Especially in matters pertaining colonial issues Dutch politics often conflicted with American interest. Added to this was the fear of the atomic bomb, the legitimacy of its usage and how living in a nuclear age changed military and society. Neither blindly following America nor getting charmed by Soviet diplomacy were seen as the right thing to do, and so the government remained largely aloof to the international arena, following a policy of general neutrality.³³ These years of détente ended in 1956, when events in Egypt and Hungary both damaged Atlantic relations and showed the west the 'true' nature of Soviet communism. The crisis in Egypt concerning the nationalization of the Suez Canal led to a brief armed conflict between Egypt and a coalition of Britain, France and Israel after months of fruitless negotiations late October. The Netherlands supported the coalition who, in their eyes, finally stood up to protect their (former) colonial interests. In the meantime, noncommunist nationalist protesters in Hungary revolted against communist rule, wanting to become a neutral country. After initially promising to negotiate with the protesters the uprising was forcefully put down by Soviet troops early November. The United States, facing two nationalist crises, could not rightfully support its allies against a nationalist Egyptian president *and* threaten the Soviets not to intervene against nationalist protesters. It chose to force the coalition to cease fighting and berated the Soviets for invading Hungary. However, Hungary was not deemed important enough to risk going to war with the Soviet Union.

The brutal Soviet actions were met by many Europeans with utter contempt, and in the Netherlands led to anticommunist riots and speeches throughout the country. The events showed that Soviet intentions were rightfully mistrusted all along and that the dissension amongst the allied countries over Suez and colonial

³² Duco Hellema, 'Van de Geest van Geneve tot de Hongaarse revolutie. Nederland en de Sovjetdreiging, 1954-1956' in *De Koude Oorlog, Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht in de jaren '50*, 178-197, there 178, 181, 188; Koedijk, 'Van "Vrede en Vrijheid" tot "Volk en Verdediging"', 67-68.

³³ Hellema, 'Nederland en de Sovjetdreiging', 187; Koedijk, 'Van "Vrede en Vrijheid" tot "Volk en Verdediging"', 68-69.

matters had led to a failure in a unified response to Soviet actions in Hungary. In the eyes of the Netherlands peaceful coexistence had failed, and a unified NATO coalition was now more important than ever.³⁴

³⁴ Hellema, 'Nederland en de Sovjetdreiging', 191-195.

Chapter 2: Propaganda and informing 1945-1956

The challenges of WWII

The capitulation of the Third Reich on 8 May 1945 marked the end of five full years of German occupation of the Netherlands. These five years of occupation and liberation had devastated the country and torn up its population. It had seen the installment of a new government with new rules and litigation, the death of hundreds of thousands men, women and children, the displacement of even more, the rise of a 'fifth column' of traitors and to a lesser extent collaborators and an enormous amount of material damage in the form of destroyed cities, ruined and inundated swathes of land and lack of adequate housing. The economy had also been ruined and plundered which had left the country with a gigantic scarcity of material and machines. To top it off, no source of revenue or material could be brought in from its colony, the Dutch East Indies.

Added to all these material troubles, the population of the Netherlands had lived in isolation for the last five years. The information it had of the situation in the Netherlands and the rest of the world was scattered and often based on hearsay or incomplete information given by resistance press or the London-based underground radio, *Radio Oranje*.

This is the backdrop against which it was up to the emergency government to deal with the daunting task of organizing the chaos left behind and coordinating the massive rebuilding efforts required to stabilize the country. And for this to work it had to inform the public of its plans and intentions. What were the ideas driving these new informing policies and how did the government go about to implementing these? What were some of the main obstacles and how did these affect the course set out by the government? How did informing policy change and adapt to the new realities over the course of the next decade?

The Regeeringsvoorlichtingsdienst.

During the war the government in exile in London had already undertaken steps to inform the people in the Netherlands. Based on the model of the BBC and its

informing strategies it had created the *Regeeringsvoorlichtingsdienst* (RVD). This Government Information Service was tasked with providing accurate information on the war to Dutch society. Through the aforementioned *Radio Oranje* it began to regularly broadcast shows to boost Dutch morale. Starting in October of 1944, the informing service of the temporary Military Authority in the liberated south began to broadcast the show *'Herrijzend Nederland'* under the leadership of, and with fiery speeches by Johannes (Joop) Landré, also known as 'The Fox'.³⁵

The power of these radio broadcasts and other direct informing measures, such as the government produced magazine *'Commentaar'* were not lost on the new emergency prime minister, Wim Schemerhorn, who assumed office on June 24 1945. During his internment in the war in the camp for political prisoners in Sint-Michielsgestel he and several other high-ranking politicians formed radical new ideas for Dutch society after the war. They saw the end of the war as the ideal opportunity to do away with the old pillars of society that had divided the country before the war and to 'create' a new, better society with a new sort of citizen. But in order for these renewal ideas to work the population also had to be convinced of the necessity of these renewal ideas. This is where the newly formed RVD come into play. In Schemerhorn's mind, the service would not limit itself to just transmitting facts, and should not shy away from the use of direct propaganda: "If a government however wants to be defensible than it will not suffice, in a period of conflict, to merely provide purely real information [...] propaganda is an unpleasant word; but it's all about defensibility. We have no want for a propaganda-machine, but we can't just leave the interpretation of several measures open for anybody."³⁶

Starting 1 September 1945, the new RVD, led by one of Schemerhorn's fellow prisoners and trustees, Hendrik Brugmans, continued the wartime operations of *Radio Oranje* and *Commentaar*. These efforts were combined with a newly created service 'Oog en Oor' ('Eye and Ear'), which was charged with directly gathering intelligence on the information needs of the population, and

³⁵ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 45-46, 49, 51; 'Herrijzend Nederland' means as much as 'The Netherlands rising from the ashes'

³⁶ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 53, 56. Schemerhorn quote from 27 juli 1945; van der Wiel, 'De presentatie van het regeringsbeleid', 58, 59.

Schemerhorn's 'Praatjes op de Brug' ('Talks on the Bridge', copied from both Roosevelt's and wartime Prime Minister Gerbrandy's radio talks) in which he directly addressed the population.

This plethora of informing measures quickly caused friction with the existing press. Not only did the government magazine *Commentaar* use an excessive amount of paper in a time of scarcity, but the press also felt it was bypassed in its role as informing body. On top of this, the service cost a lot of money, something that did not go unnoticed in a time of rebuilding and poverty.³⁷

Despite the growing stream of criticism from society on the RVD, which remained propagandistic and defensive of government policy, Schemerhorn stubbornly kept the RVD the way it was. It finally came to a massive debate on 31 January 1946 when the Catholic member of parliament Th.F.M. Schaepman translated the general Dutch feeling towards the RVD and accused Brugmans of pursuing propaganda policies: "In a country ruled by democracy there is no room for a government propaganda service, something the Government Information Service is more and more guilty of lately, as one cannot deny that this service is using propaganda in many an area."³⁸ If we look at the underlying reasons for this clash of ideas on the nature of propaganda it seems inevitable that such a debate would take place. On the one hand the sense of unity felt during the occupation, the discontent felt by the imprisoned elite for the pre-war societal system of pillarization, the perceived power of propaganda during the war and the need for clear action in matters of rebuilding led the emergency government on a course that went against the extensive pre-war notions of free press. On the other hand, there was a propaganda-weary population that had fought against a totalitarian enemy and was very cautious and guarded against anything that resembled the German's policies. Moral purity in questions on 'right' and 'wrong' had become the virtue, and government issued propaganda, due to its association with the occupation was definitely something that was considered to be wrong. On top of that, the pre-war pillars were gaining strength and momentum now that they could rebuild their old circles. Especially in the

³⁷ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 59-61; van der Wiel, 'De presentatie van het regeringsbeleid', 60.

³⁸ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1945-1946, 23^e vergadering, 31 januari 1946, 514. These can be found at <http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl>.

liberal and protestant pillars, pillars that generally did not appreciate outside interference in their circles, any form of government interference was seen as detrimental to society.³⁹

The committee van Leuven-Goedhart and its repercussions

The debate of 31 January 1946 resulted in the appointment of an advisory committee led by journalist and politician Gerrit Jan van Leuven-Goedhart that had to evaluate the role of the RVD and the nature of informing policies, had to differentiate between said policies and propaganda and had to make suggestions for change. When its report came out in September 1946 its conclusions both underpinned and rationalized the widespread contempt for the RVD. While it agreed that the government policies right after the war reminded the Dutch of the German occupiers and went against the longstanding Dutch tradition of freedom of speech, it also stated that government informing in times like these “could not be missed.” It differentiated government informing by occupiers, who wished their informing efforts were lasting, and that of the ‘free world’ which sought to ‘restore of values and opinions.’ In the free world, this kind of informing could be criticized. Furthermore it agreed that in a state of war propagandistic informing was *acceptable*, but that these elements should be omitted. In the specific case of the Netherlands the leadership was overzealous in its supply of information, which far surpassed the demand for it. In trying to find an answer to the complex issues between government informing policies and communication towards its populace the findings were slightly ambiguous. On the one hand there was no such thing as a clear distinction between ‘good’ informing being clarification and ‘bad’ informing being propaganda, and in no case should informing “be meant as a way to dispel a civilian from his life- and worldviews or even his chosen political conceptions; in other words: the ‘education into a citizen’ – and one with government complacent conceptions – lies wholly outside of the responsibility of the government and its informing policies.” On the other hand it agreed that sometimes propaganda was a necessity in order to clarify certain policies. When and how it could ‘clarify’ these

³⁹ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 100-101; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 263.

subjects depended on the nature and controversy of said subjects. If it *had* to be done 'propaganda' had to be open, honest and recognizable and should be done through the press, and not directly to the people.⁴⁰ It had found that the reasons the informing efforts were failing were threefold. First of all, the efforts lacked unity and coordination because of decentralized services and lack of communication between departments. Secondly, the people working on informing efforts had no clear job descriptions, causing them to work rather aimlessly. Lastly there was no generosity in providing news to or informing the press. By centralizing informing efforts, clearly defining the boundaries of 'informing' and more cooperation between departments the committee hoped to solve these problems.⁴¹

The committee found a supporter of their cause in Schemerhorn's new press secretary Landré, who, after his work for *Radio Oranje* became one of the RVD's leading officials, and even became director after Brugmans had to clear the field in the aftermath of the parliamentary debate on 31 January. In the months preceding the publication and conclusions of the rapport Landré also argued that informing should be left to professionals and that the RVD should be the link between government and populace. Later on he lobbied for the RVD to be an advisory 'braintrust' to the cabinet and suggested the RVD be *the* central government informing agency as opposed to informing done by departmental press secretaries. He was eager to become the direct link between the government and the RVD and stressed the importance of 'proper' informing efforts and the necessity of capable leadership.⁴² With these attempts of increasing the RVD's influence, Landré also sought out more power for himself, placing the head of the RVD on the same level as the ministers.⁴³

⁴⁰ G.J. van Heuven-Goedhart *Overheidsvoorlichting, Rapport der adviescommissie overheidsbeleid inzake voorlichting, ingesteld 6 maart 1946* ('s-Gravenhage 1946), 7-11; Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 84-85.

⁴¹ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministeries voor Algemeene Oorlogvoering van het Koninkrijk (AOK) en van Algemene Zaken (AZ): Kabinet van de Minister-President (KMP), nummer toegang 2.03.01, inventarisnummer 11622, 'Nota over de re-organisatie van de overheidsvoorlichting' to Prime Minister Louis Beel, September 1946.

⁴² NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 6333, Letter from Landré to [unknown], in which he seeks an audience with Prime Minister Beel, 19 June 1946.

⁴³ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 6333, 'Toelichting ambtelijke positie van het hoofd van den Regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst', June 1946.

The Hermans Reorganizing committee

The newly elected Catholic Prime Minister, Louis Beel, however, did not adopt the advice by the committee or Landré. Not only was there too much resistance from different departments, who feared centralizing would give too much power to the RVD at the expense of their own, but more importantly the service was already too expensive in a time of recession. Centralizing informing efforts would require a radical reconstruction and reorganization of all that had happened so far, and would drive up the costs even more.⁴⁴ Instead Beel listened to his ministers and concluded the report would not have the desired effect. Instead he kept the current situation of different departmental informing sections, maintained ministerial responsibilities and actually scaled down RVD efforts in matters of press and radio (limiting the service to exposés, film, advertisements, and publishing books and brochures) and in effect limited the role of the RVD to a technical coordinating one. However, with these plans he still needed to reorganize the service. In order to achieve this, the government approved another committee led by Beel's protégé and press secretary, Hans Hermans, in January 1947 to identify the problems within the RVD and to give recommendations for its reorganization.⁴⁵

During the investigation, it became clear that RVD director and senior member of the reorganizing committee Landré and press secretary Hermans did not get along as they were both vying for influence on informing policies. During the investigation Hermans evaluated the flaws and fallacies of the RVD in a searing 8-page memorandum on the RVD. Whilst the service did not get off to a flying start due to its dealings with the free press, its poorly chosen name (which reminded the people of its German predecessor) and its 'dictatorial' rule by Brugmans and his colleague Piet Wansink its problems were greatly exaggerated by the leadership of Landré. According to Hermans, Landré had 'strong propagandistic views' on informing which could be explained by his previous careers as marketing-agent with Philips Electronics. He took on too many functions and responsibilities causing him to delegate too many important issues

⁴⁴ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 87.

⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 11614, Memorandum from Beel to Landré, 31 January 1947.

to his second in command, G. van der Mey, who lacked 'feeling' for dealing with the problems of free press and government. It became clear that because the management "did not know what government informing [in principle] meant" the fundamental problems of the RVD could be traced back to mismanagement and a lack of a clear course.⁴⁶

The committee itself went to work and presented its findings in June 1947. Not surprisingly, its main conclusions conformed the earlier held ideas of the government. The RVD was considered to be in chaos and disarray, causing unnecessary spending. The committee suggested several reorganizations within the RVD to structure its new technical and coordinating role and proposed the establishment of an 'informing counsel' which would consist of the heads of the departmental informing services led by the ministers press secretary. It would advise the Prime Minister and the cabinet on certain matters and would devise the informing policies. As a result these tasks would no longer lie with the RVD. Naturally, Landré did not agree with his diminished role.⁴⁷

As part of his investigation, and because of his critique on the RVD for lacking clarity, Hermans had to define the nature of 'informing'. Because the government itself was a great source of news itself, it did require some form of informing. This should however be limited to providing factual news on government doings directly to the press. Under no circumstance should the government direct itself directly to the public with the exception of instructional films. In his final considerations on what informing actually *was*, Hermans defined government informing as something targeted outward to specific groups, as something that should only pertain to government news and policies and lastly, and most importantly "informing will not result in propaganda, but in clarification which allows the citizen to compose an informed judgment of government policies. This will only service the democracy. Especially in this day and age, in a time when government activities have expanded to such an extent that nobody can tell when anymore whether he is being properly informed, there is a high risk that

⁴⁶ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 11617, Memorandum from Hermans to Beel [while the memo is not signed or dated, its nature makes it clear that it could only have been written by Hermans].

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 11631, 'Rapport van de Commissie betreffende de reorganisatie van de overheidsvoorlichting, met geleidebrief en concept'; Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 91-92.

people will base their judgments on bad or even no information. At that point, the time of the demagogues will have come. Good informing can grow to be our primary weapon for defending democracy.”⁴⁸

The end of an ‘era’

In the end, the suggestions of the Hermans committee were implemented. The RVD was reduced to a technical and coordinating service without any real influence on government informing policies. Policymaking on informing was now in the hands of an ‘informing counsel’ containing the Prime Minister’s press secretary (Hermans), the head of the RVD (Landré), and heads of departmental informing services. The reduced role of the RVD was in part the result of the resurgence of pillarized press and society and in part because of its own overzealous course of action right after the war. The ideas of Schemerhorn and likeminded politicians failed to find enough traction amongst other parts of society and saw their efforts largely washed away by reactionary politics. The RVD remained as an organization, but its immediate post-war dominance in the field of informing had been greatly diminished.

On propaganda the renewal ideas of Schemerhorn and his ideal of a ‘new citizen’ definitely did not strike a chord with Dutch society. Both the van Leuven-Goedhart and the Hermans committee outright rejected any form of propaganda. Informing had to be done clearly, honestly, fairly and most of all, not directly to the people. In the context of reemerging pillarization there was no room for a government that tried to pre-interpret or explain government policy. It had to provide facts, which then could be interpreted by each pillar separately. There was simply no room for any form of propaganda in a country that just endured five years of it.⁴⁹

Informing after 1947

After the far-reaching rapports of the van Leuven-Goedhart and Hermans committees direct government informing and the role of the RVD were

⁴⁸ Underlined in original, NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 11633, Memorandum on informing by Hermans, 1947.

⁴⁹ Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 100-106.

drastically reduced. The RVD now only coordinated the technical aspect of informing and the financial distribution of funds for departmental informing campaigns.⁵⁰ In an overview of their work in October 1948, it is clear that their activities were limited to answering submitted questions on government policy, providing informing material, facilitating exhibits and tours, radio broadcasts, and coordinating the production of government films and newsreels and negotiating trade agreements.⁵¹

Despite these limited tasks the expenses on informing were still considered to be too high. In June 1949, a newly appointed committee led by Cees Fock re-investigated the term 'informing' after departments found loopholes to avoid the restricting funds for informing efforts. It reaffirmed the neutral nature informing should have in that it should never contest the opinions of other parties. Furthermore, central coordination between departments was lacking, resulting in departmental film-services, which all produced their own, expensive, films. Effectively it called for a centralization of informing under the umbrella of the RVD.⁵²

At the same time, head of the RVD Landré followed Hermans as head of the informing counsel in May 1949. Even though Landré had always been in favor of more direct control by the RVD over informing policy, he announced that he wanted to continue the policies and methods set by his predecessor. Landré now also was anointed by the new prime minister Willem Drees to be his personal press secretary, an influential position he had coveted for three years. He now stood at the head of the RVD, the informing counsel and was the personal press secretary of the prime minister.

The new challenge of communism and the BVC

As the Dutch government sided with the Western bloc from 1948 onward the fear and despise for communism grew steadily. This fear already led to the increasing political isolation of the CPN in national politics by barring them from

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 91-97.

⁵¹ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01 inv.nr 6333, 'Overzicht der werkzaamheden van de verschillende afdelingen van de Regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst in de maand October 1948', September 1948.

⁵² Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 125-128.

important subcommittees and went even further by excluding the communist newspaper *De Waarheid* (The Truth) from government information, keeping tabs on communists, reporting any communist activities and by basically denying communist access to important matters.⁵³

But the fear of an actual communist invasion within the government had been limited. This all changed with the North Korean invasion in June 1950. All of a sudden a Soviet attack was not only considered a possibility, but almost likely to happen, as the act of aggression by the North Koreans was seen as orchestrated by Moscow. This increasing fear of an attack also concerned high-ranking Army officials. After nearly two months, in August, the head of the Army Informing Service F.E. Hollander proposed to do something about the situation and asked secretary-general of the Ministry of General Affairs Cees Fock to set up an informal committee. This committee was charged by Fock to give an overview of what was available and what was required in technical and organizational means in order to deal with different stages of warfare. The informal committee consisted of Hollander himself, RVD director Landré, chief press secretary for foreign affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs J.A. van Houten, acting head of the Army Informing Service G.P. Kiès, head of Navy Informing Service H.J. Noppen and chief press secretary for the Ministry of Economic Affairs M. Weisglas.⁵⁴ Immediately after its inception the committee broadened the old definition of 'informing' to include Psychological Warfare. In its highly classified rapport on 'Informing in Wartime' the committee identified seven different stages of the upcoming war ranging from the intensification of psychological warfare by the enemy, which would require increased vigilance towards the enemy and intensifying counter-propaganda, to the phase of an actual invasion, in which case the government has had to flee the country and coordinate war efforts from abroad. Even though the challenges of the first stage could be met by the existing informing counsel, the committee deemed it advisable for the continuity of policy to install a "core organization" who would covertly steer the informing efforts towards "the required psychological defense" required to

⁵³ Dick van Engelen, *Frontdienst, De BVD in de koude oorlog* (Amsterdam 2007), 13-17, 278; Wagenaar, *De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*, 132.

⁵⁴ Baudet, *Het vierde Wapen*, 92; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11739, Rapport 'Voorlichting in Oorlogstijd'.

transition into the next phase. This core organization would be called the *Oorlogs Voorlichtings Commissie* (Wartime Informing Committee, or OVC) and should have far reaching authority within the government and have full control over government informing in case the war actually broke out. This committee would (naturally) consist of the same people who were in the informal committee so that the essential terrains of government informing would be covered. But because the OVC could not magically appear out of thin air, a precursory committee had to be established to pave the way for the OVC before the war broke out. This committee would be called the *Bijzondere Voorlichtingscommissie* (Special Informing Committee, or BVC).⁵⁵

The proposal for the establishment of the OVC was accepted on 27 February 1951, and the recommendations for its tasks were virtually the same as the informal committee's rapport prescribed. A month later, the BVC was also installed by Drees and was given the dual task "to plan and coordinate the general problems with government informing in the face of the growing defense efforts on the one hand and austerity to bridge the payment deficit on the other" and "to maintain and reinforce where possible the democratic forces existing amongst the Dutch people in their defense against totalitarian systems."⁵⁶ The installation of this secret committee marks a clear break from the publicly held assumptions within the government and society regarding informing. Directly influencing the public opinion was now not only allowed, it was actually encouraged in order to face the new problems of communist and their 'fifth column' in society. The government did not want to be taken by surprise and endure another occupation again, and in order to be prepared, certain liberties and previously held values had to be reassessed and reprioritized. However, it was (correctly) conceived that because the public would not share this renewed take on informing, the BVC and the OVC were created as highly classified committees that only reported directly to Prime Minister Drees. Their work

⁵⁵ Baudet, *Het vierde Wapen*, 93; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11739, Rapport 'Voorlichting in Oorlogstijd'.

⁵⁶ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11739, secret memorandum from Prime Minister Drees, 27 February 1951; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, secret memorandum from Prime Minister Drees, 31 March 1951.

received the highest priority and the committee could summon any government official for advice or questioning.⁵⁷

The BVC and its work

Landré, already head of the informing counsel and the RVD, was now also appointed head of the BVC, which further consisted of the aforementioned G.P. Kiès and newly appointed chief press secretaries of the ministries of Foreign Affairs (H.F. Eschauzier), Economic Affairs (J. Hoogwater), Agriculture, Fishery and Food (J. Breunis) and Social Affairs (G.J. Lammers). The committee understood the gravity of their task and immediately went to work. Two months later it reported its initial findings on informing and stated that the government had to inform and clarify their policies even more in this time of social and financial-economic hardship. Where it was clear that Landré did not have “the intention of going down the road of 1945”, the committee did recognize the necessity and utilization of the ties between the government and the representatives of the free press. On the nature of the informing message, the committee iterated that government statements and clarifications had to “clarify concepts” which would underline the severity of the situation, which in turn would increase both the comprehension for problems and the willingness by the public to make sacrifices. Furthermore the messages should show concrete examples of what the government did to combat the “difficulties” of communism in order to reinforce the nations resistance. The same rapport also indicated the different media the government could utilize to spread these messages. It grouped them in media without extra costs, such as radio, press and “incidentally” newsreels and in media that would require extra costs, such as commissioned short films, pamphlets, advertisements and posters. In all, the need for government informing and even propaganda was urgent.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, secret memorandum from Prime Minister Drees, 31 March 1951.

⁵⁸ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, Memorandum from Landré to Drees, 28 May 1951; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11722, 5th BVC meeting, 24 April 1951. Hereafter I will only give the BVC meeting number and date. Any BVC Meeting after 1953 can be found in inv. nr 11723.

In his response to these recommendations Drees shared the feeling of urgency and stated that the government had to “stimulate anticommunist informing through societal organizations” by secretly providing these organizations information gathered through government organizations. However, the informing efforts “should defer from making unprovoked public anticommunist propaganda”. He emphasized that the problems should not be posited in a negative and gloomy manner, but rather should focus on the positive aspects of democracy. Furthermore, the troublesome state of the economy should be blamed on the bad terms of trade and not on the increased defense expenditures that was necessitated as a condition for receiving American aid. With regards to media, it stood to reason that for now, only the media without added expenditures should be used.⁵⁹

And so the BVC set about its tasks. After a year the committee evaluated its work and reaffirmed the difficulty of the given tasks. It seemed that although the increase in defense spending had been accepted, there was a risk that too much fear for communism was installed in the population. Nonetheless anticommunism should still be propagated: “The free people are caught in a cold war and have to defend themselves; therefor, they should not wait, but take initiative.” Whether or not this should be achieved through a counter-offensive or via highlighting the positive values of democracy was a question that remained unresolved by the committee. What they did agreed on, was that its goals should be achieved through ‘free informing’. However, in this state of war (“even though it is still a cold war”) a regulating government influence “could not be missed.”⁶⁰

The urgency of this anti-communist propaganda was not only instigated by Dutch officials, but was also underpinned by NATO. In an “Cosmic Top Secret” report on the necessity of Psychological Warfare, it urged the all the members of NATO to do more to inform the public on the importance of NATO in the new

⁵⁹ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11722, appendix to the 17th meeting of the BVC, Meeting with Drees on 5 June 1951.

⁶⁰ 61st meeting of the BVC, 21 april 1952.

international setting and to prepare contingency plans on moral defense in case war broke out.⁶¹

With the BVC at the top of the informing pyramid, answering only to Prime Minister Drees, there were no more major changes in informing policy over the next several years. The committee did its best to execute its tasks and to promote Atlanticist/NATO ideals and to increase the 'moral resistance' of the people against communism. It did so by several means. One of the foremost was by releasing a bi-weekly digest on communist activities that was handed out to opinion leaders and public influencers such as members of parliament, members of the press, union leaders and the elite of the pillars in society. In this way, factual information on communism would be disseminated through newspapers, speeches and other 'natural' ways of free press without having a clear governmental stamp on the message. The same applied to the practice of directly talking to the aforementioned opinion leaders and asking them for their opinions on what measures to take and to actively inform them of the threat and their role in informing their constituencies of said threat. It also saw a great advantage in using film to inform the public which it did in two ways. First of all, it commissioned the film 'Home of the Free' written and filmed by Polygoon editor Kees Stip, and released in 1952. The movie was written to promote NATO and had a clear anticommunist and pro-democracy message. Unfortunately for the BVC, the film did not pass the film censorship board's tests and was not allowed to be screened publicly.⁶² The critiques on the film from the press were pretty straightforward as the film ended with a line stating the RVD as the commissioner of the film. It saw the film as clear government propaganda. For the BVC, this was a sign that the public did still not accept being informed/warned directly and refrained from responding to these critiques to avoid further confrontation. The other means to use film were the newsreels.

⁶¹ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, Memorandum from the BVC to Prime Minister Drees, 'Memorandum inzake de overheidsvoorlichting in Nederland over de internationale samenwerking,' 5 December 1952; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1749, 'Report on the Interest of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) in Wartime Psychological Warfare Operations,' 8 May 1952.

⁶² The film censorship board was a committee that screened all films and gave out age requirements or even banned controversial work. It was a pillarized committee which mainly focused on the level of 'offensiveness' or threat to common decency and 'public order'. 'Home of the free' was considered to be too political in nature and could only be shown privately.

Over the years the RVD, and later the BVC came in contact with Polygoon/Profilti on several occasions, something that will be discussed in the last three chapters. The BVC also stimulated private anticommunist organizations with funding and information on communist activity gathered by the BVD. The most notorious of these organizations was the Dutch chapter of the French anti-communist organization 'Paix et Liberté.' Yet another effort in the field of psychological warfare was the stimulation and propagation of the civil defense organization *Bescherming Bevolking*. This organization was meant to give the population a sense of security and a means to actively help in case of an emergency. Finally, the BVC also made contingency plans for psychological warfare if an actual war should break out.⁶³ All of these activities were planned and executed at the height of the cold war in the first half of the fifties. Over the years it had become clear that the nature of the Soviet threat had changed from an actual invasion, something sufficient planning could counteract, to the threat of a nuclear war, something that required a wholly different strategy. After the events in late 1956 the BVC stopped the production of its digest and its support of 'Vrede en Vrijheid' and went on a different course.

The change in informing

Over a period of ten years, ideas on informing underwent several thorough changes. At first, informing was deemed necessary. The events of WWII had both been destructive, but had also shown the power of informing. In the immediate chaotic aftermath of the war, propaganda and directly influencing the public was deemed acceptable by the renewal-thinkers in the government. But societal backlash, WWII trauma and the reactionary elements of the pillars quickly put an end to this trend. Further lack of funding and conservatism in the governmental departments forced the newfound RVD to accept a minor technical and coordinating role in government informing efforts. However, under leadership of Landré and in light of a growing threat of communism the ideas on informing in the higher circles of the government changed. In order to combat the threat of an

⁶³ Koedijk, 'Van "Vrede en Vrijheid" tot "Volk en Verdediging"', 65-66; Baudet, "The ideological equivalent of the atomic bomb", 273-276; 55th meeting of the BVC, 10 March 1952.

internal 'fifth column' after 1948 and to be able to combat the Soviets when they would invade the Netherlands, the moral and spiritual defensibility of the population had to be increased and fortified. This need to make plans on moral defense and psychological warfare grew exponentially after the North Korean invasion of the south in June 1950. Now, the Dutch government did not only approve creating the aforementioned plans, but was actively promoted to do so by NATO.

To this end, the means and definition of informing had to be widened to allow and justify a more direct way of influencing the public. Because the general public did not perceive the threat of an invasion as high as government officials, it had to be persuaded that it was in fact in danger, and that defense expenditures were indeed necessary. The urgency of this message was deemed so high that directly influencing the public through means that would previously be considered 'propaganda' was now not just acceptable, it was even necessary. However, it was correctly seen that any attempt at directly informing the populace would (and as the case of 'Home of the Free' shows) encounter resistance from society. Therefore, the BVC had to be constantly aware of the fine line it walked between direct and indirect propaganda.⁶⁴ In the end, just as Floribert Baudet concludes, it is unclear whether the BVC actually reached its goals of persuading the public. What we can say here is that it actively *tried* to do so. What this meant in the case of the newsreels we shall see in the last chapter.

In the case of the BVC, film was already deemed a medium that could be used to inform and influence the public. But these ideas were not based on new ideas. Films, and especially newsreels, were already used in WWII by both the Germans and the Allies to boost morale and to serve as a vehicle for propaganda. Ideas on film and the power of film as an informing vehicle therefore also existed in government circles, including the RVD. The next chapter will deal with the notions held on films and newsreels as a means to inform the public.

⁶⁴ Already in one of the first meetings a high union-official notes that efforts to directly inform the public will surely not be met with much enthusiasm. Any informing also should not be demagogic in nature, for that would ensure loss in morale; 8th BVC meeting, 5 May 1951; 16th BVC Meeting, 5 June 1951.

Chapter 3: Thoughts on film and newsreels after WWII

After WWII the Dutch government quickly recognized the potential of the newsreels as an informing tool. In investigating the nature of the relationship between the two after the war, we can see that the government and Polygoon/Profilti frequently came in contact with each other. This was largely a result of the newsreels predominantly reporting (and relying on) set events and the government's efforts in rebuilding the country after the war, which were often visual events. In these dealings between the government and Polygoon/Profilti the government acted on existing and new notions on film as a medium. These notions were based on new ideas on film, wartime experiences and the aforementioned changing ideas on informing.

Before we can discuss both Polygoon/Profilti's own ideas and position in society and if we want to see why the government acted the way it did we need to explore the underlying realm of ideas on film that existed in government circles after the war. This chapter deals with a short background on newsreels, the position of film in society, its perceived power and role and finally the real actions undertaken by the government to influence Polygoon/Profilti right after the war.

International development of Newsreels until 1945

The invention of camera's and the means to project these images on screens can be considered one of the turning points in human history. All of a sudden the world could be captured in a way unlike any before. Moving images greatly enhanced the power to imagine and to show what other parts of the world looked like. In the first ten to twenty years after the invention of film however, the role of the medium in informing was very limited. Newsreels and documentary films were predominantly a sideshow for carnivals, providing a small glance into other parts of the world for several cents. Soon enough entrepreneurs saw the potential of the medium and began documenting local events to show at screenings later that day. In 1908, the French company Pathé

was the first to make reels containing news, quickly followed by others. In the beginning, these newsreels mainly consisted of staged and scripted 'news' and local activities to lure people into the carnival tents, but during WWI and thereafter the notion of films as bearers of information and means to show events and to educate the people began to grow steadily. From the twenties onward, newsreels began to professionalize and were shown more and more in movie theaters. At first, it was hard to fill the required amount of meters to fill a newsreel due to the slow and cumbersome nature of filming. Newsreel editors had to rely on their film crews to provide decent footage. If there was not enough 'real' news they had to 'create' it by turning to non-news such as cornerstone-layings and parades. But as technology improved and the power of newsreels was discovered the newsreel companies were invited to all sorts of events. Now editors began facing a new problem. With a wide range of items to film, a selection of what to show had to be made. Where theater exploiters wanted entertaining newsreels, other segments of society wanted the newsreels to resemble magazines and wanted special attention to their events. Editors now had the daunting task of balancing the newsreels between entertainment, real news and news that could be viewed by everybody, i.e. not offend certain groups.⁶⁵

Along with this balancing act the nature of the newsreel production process led to a grouping of newsreel items into three types of items: sudden events, in which the newsreels had the same journalistic responsibilities as the press and radio, scheduled events, in which the newsreels are usually informed of the existence of the event and had time to prepare their coverage and items of general interest that often have no topical value, also known as 'fillers' or 'stoppers' that could be used when there was little/no real news.⁶⁶

Because of its enormous reach and being under constant public scrutiny it is not surprising that in the countries with the largest dissemination of newsreels (America, Great-Britain and France) and, especially in the case of America and its history of 'free press', the production of newsreels came with strong underlying notions of 'honesty' and 'objectivity', or, in the words of Movietone editor Dan

⁶⁵ Montague, 'Public opinion and the Newsreels', 49-53.

⁶⁶ Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels Across The World*, 19.

Doherty “To let the camera tell the story.” A 1952 UNESCO rapport verified these longstanding ideas on newsreels as “a universal means of mass communication”, as a means of entertainment and not as something that “compel[s] [the public] to give thought to social, political or other problems”, and especially as something that “carries its own authority, representing events that have actually happened” which added to its conviction.⁶⁷

These notions of honesty and objectivity however did not really exist in countries like Germany and Italy, where the national-socialist and fascist governments used the newsreels by overtly and in subtler ways influencing and censoring them to shape public opinion. In the case of Germany propaganda ministers Goebbels even refused to create a government-run newsreel company in the pre-war years. Instead, he wanted to conceal his propaganda efforts by influencing the production of the four German newsreel companies. In the Netherlands during the war, this policy translated into the German decision to keep the existing film production companies Polygoon and Profilti in place and to let them continue producing newsreels under German supervision. However, as the war progressed, this policy became increasingly harder to maintain, and the production of newsreels eventually came under German and collaborating Dutch control.⁶⁸

But the propagandistic and explanatory power of newsreels during this time was also not lost on the Allies. As the power of film was already acknowledged, the U.S. embedded hundreds of cameramen in its armed forces to film the war. The images of the war were then used in newsreels and shown at home to boost morale. Even during the war, the importance of motion pictures, newsreels and documentary series that drew on these, such as *March of Time* or *Why we Fight*, which were issued by the United States Office of Wartime Information, were

⁶⁷ Montague, ‘Public opinion and the Newsreels’, 49-53; Doherty and Lawrenson, ‘The Newsreel, its production and significance’, 357-360; Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels Across The World*, 10, 29, 33.

⁶⁸ Roel Vande Winkel, ‘Nazi newsreels in Europe, 1939–1945: the many faces of Ufa’s foreign weekly newsreel (Auslandstonwoche) versus German’s weekly newsreel (Deutsche Wochenschau)’ in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24 (No.1 2004), 5-34, there 7; Roel Vande Winkel, ‘Filmjournaals in Bezet Nederland (1940-1944), De Nederlandse nieuwsfilmoorlog in internationaal perspectief’, in *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (No.1 2003), 72-92, there 80-84; Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13283, 90.03, ‘Memorandum van C.S. Roem, Betreffende zijn houding tijdens de bezettingsjaren 1940-1945’, 25 august 1945; Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 90.04, ‘Polygoon in de bezetting’, C. van der Wilden, [date unknown, probably late 1945].

recognized by many as being “a primary source of public information and education” and played a major role “on our present problems of war and the subsequent transition from a war to a peace economy.”⁶⁹

In this way the newsreel as a medium had transformed from a sideshow at carnivals and a simple form of entertainment to an important informational and entertaining medium *and* to an overt (and covert) propaganda medium, all the while maintaining its simple formula of showing several subjects or events in one reel, giving an overview of the past week.

Film as an important cultural carrier

But how should we fit these newsreels into the wider picture of the role of film as a medium in Dutch society at the end of the war? In early 1944 four men in the Dutch film industry, E.J. Verschueren, Paul Schuiten, Lou Lichtveld and J.C. Bouman, commissioned to re-evaluate the role of the government vis-à-vis the film industry and to give recommendations for the purging of said industry of ‘wrong’ elements after the war. In their rapport of August 1944 they stressed the new importance of film as a cultural carrier, which had gained tremendous importance in a country that had slowly lost its own during the war. While the government before the war only valued film in an economic and ethical perspective, the “cultural-aesthetical” value had come to the foreground in light of new artistic ideas and technological advances. Because of its “possibilities for shaping national consciousness” and the “large, continuously growing interest” film had in society it could now be placed on the same footing as radio and press in matters of informing value and therefor warranted the same amount of attention by the government. They suggested setting up a committee to organize, regulate, stimulate and protect the Dutch film industry.⁷⁰ This protection was mainly deemed necessary to counter the imminent threat of an overflow and domination of the movie theaters by American movies, companies and the accompanying and unwanted American culture. In a response to the temporary

⁶⁹ Mayer, ‘Fact into Film’, 206-207.

⁷⁰ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 963, ‘Rapport inzake de stimuleering, ontwikkeling en ordening van het Filmwezen in Nederland’, 3; NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 1298, Letter from Bouman to JCB/VB [?], 3 Juli 1945.

movie-theater law of 7 September 1944 this problem was considered to be exceptionally difficult as the writer not only agreed that “The last few years have clearly shown that images, and in particular the moving image known as ‘film’, are extraordinary powerful influencers. In order to maintain our culture it will be imperative to carefully and systematically promote Dutch film production”, but also that “opposite the Scylla of American penetration, there is the Charybdis of intense direct state interference with intellectual life.” This thought-process was definitely not uncommon, and shows the perceived importance of film and the difficult and precarious, but also necessary task of government regulation.⁷¹

That film as a medium had great cultural value can also be seen in a manifest to all artists right after the war. The manifest, signed by 108 prominent architects, artists, filmmakers (including three of the writers of the re-evaluation rapport), dancers, writers, musicians, actors and more, called for all the artist to help rebuild the nation and its culture and values. It sought to stimulate the small Dutch film industry, which would surely “turn from bad to worse” if left to the commercial market. The rapport, not entirely coincidental considering the writers, also emphasized the “great cultural and social” importance of film and deemed film as “pre-eminently a medium of influence” alongside radio and press.⁷²

On the side of the government after the war the ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences (OKW) had been tasked with handling all matters pertaining film. The prevailing thoughts on this medium that served as the silver lining of the governments policies from then on can be found in a 220-page rapport on the entire Dutch film industry and the government. After also stressing the importance of film in the social and cultural sphere and the growing interest in film the rapport stated that because of this: “the government will, if she sees herself as guardian of common interests, including, more than before film, have to include the cultural element in her sphere of influence.” In discussing the danger of “cosmopolitanism” (an euphemism for American movies) it clearly voices

⁷¹ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 1298, ‘Nota to V.M.’, [exact date and sender are unknown, but the memorandum has most likely been written by the president or official of the NBB to a cabinet meeting late 1944]

⁷² Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 25.01 ‘Manifest aan de kunstenaars van Nederland’, 1945 [date unknown, right after the war], 3,4, 13.

the strong desire to guard the national psyche: “And so it is obviously important for the future of our people, that our own nature shall not be overrun by strange influences, and that on the contrary our people will be driven by that what will come from within [...] this will reinforce customs, increase happiness and multiply national values and national happiness.”⁷³

While the abovementioned considerations only pertain to the social and cultural aspect of film, the war and its propaganda had shown that film also had a strong informing aspect. With the power of film in mind, this aspect was not lost on the reforming thinkers within the new government.

Film and the government

In the OKW rapport on film the stance of the government regarding film and propaganda was also explored: “Via the Dutch film product we approach the area of informing. Not propaganda. The government, or state if you consider it, is no businessman; it requires no advertisement, an euphemism for propaganda. She also does not have a monopoly on certain political or religious convictions that would drive her to gain the most amount of influence. She is a servant of the nation, servant of the common interest. In that capacity she does have to make sure that the populace understands the actions she takes in favor of the common interest. [...] After the destructive influences, which were rampant during the war and occupation, will this, more than ever, be of the essence.”⁷⁴ These thoughts did not only cover informing films, but also the newsreels as they were: “undoubtedly the most important informing vehicle.” And while the newsreels should remain independent, they should also be “carefully guided” and given “room to grow.” In between independence and guidance the government now had to “find a mode in which it allows her to, when the government deems it useful under certain circumstances, accentuate certain events, events of state importance for example, in the newsreel or to make certain announcements, rectifications or clarifications. That’s why newsreels are important and why the

⁷³ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 884, ‘Rapport houdende een overzicht van de ontwikkeling van het bioscoopwezen in Nederland’, [date unknown, grammar and war-time references suggest 1945], 211, 214, 215.

⁷⁴ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 884, ‘Rapport houdende een overzicht van de ontwikkeling van het bioscoopwezen in Nederland’, 215-216.

government could benefit if the newsreels were to be shown by all, at least most, movie theaters, something that can be achieved by mandating showing the newsreels.” So even though government influence on a national level should be limited, especially with the recent German occupation in mind, it should not limit itself in protecting the Dutch movie going public from foreign newsreels, which could detrimentally influence the ‘national opinion.’⁷⁵

But these ideas were easier said than implemented. In the chaotic aftermath of the war, the government was completely reorganizing and restructuring itself. The medium film was now seen in light of new cultural importance as well as its informing nature, which became interesting in the new ideas on informing. Because of this dual nature it was unclear which branch of government would be responsible for what aspect of the medium. Would it be the OKW or the RVD? Accordingly, the ministry of OKW and the RVD now had to negotiate where the realm of culture ended and where the responsibility of informing started within the fluent medium of film, especially considering the fact the government hitherto had never really been involved in the medium. Where the negotiations and discussions on film as a medium right after the war are too vast and numerous to be discussed here, we *can* look at the government’s role vis-à-vis the newsreels.⁷⁶

The *Beheerscommissie* and the newsreels

As the war had left deep scars in the national psyche of the Dutch, the moral code had been completely derailed. As one rapport written by a resistance archival group explained: “We have absolutely no problem in placing a time-bomb, assassinating an opponent or forging an official document, and we laugh when

⁷⁵ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 884, ‘Rapport houdende een overzicht van de ontwikkeling van het bioscoopwezen in Nederland’, 216-218.

⁷⁶ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 5670, Letter from head of the RVD film department D. Vriesman on where a film department should be housed, 6 Juli 1945; NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 1298, letter to OKW minister Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw [late 1945], and letter from the head of the OKW film department L.J.K van Dijk to D. Vriesman, 1 November 1945.

It will suffice to say that both OKW and RVD were to have their own film departments which would dealing with their respective fields. Discussions ranged from to plans to form ‘film counsels’, to form ‘film screening committees’, about the nature of departmental film agencies, about dealing with the NBB or the creation of film-laws and which department should have which responsibility and about giving grants for scenarios.

we hear that to collaborators were hung in a butcher shop window. A policeman considers it natural to perform his duty as bad as he can and government officials have to fudge their work for the homeland, and he who has been in prison is a hero.”⁷⁷ With this in mind, the government first had to ‘purge’ the society of all the ‘wrong’ elements that had cooperated with the German occupier in order to get society back on track.

For the newsreels this meant that both companies that had made news during the war, Polygoon and Profilti, and which had collaborated with the Germans, had to cease and desist their work a month after the liberation and had to account for their wartime actions. A film purification committee was set up which had to purge the film industry of ‘wrong’ (collaborating with the German occupier) elements and had to restructure the industry accordingly. After the war it received accounts from Polygoon director Cornelis van der Wilden and Profilti director Cornelis S. Roem in which they explained what they did and why they did it. In their accounts, they stated that they never willingly cooperated and did everything in their power to hamper German or Dutch collaboration attempts, but were forced to cooperate. They did not (violently) resist the occupier because of the standing order to ‘remain at your post’ issued by the Dutch minister of interior in 1940 and because they wanted to keep production out of German hands for as long as possible. When these explanations were considered not good enough Roem and van der Wilden received work bans for two years and a year and a half respectively.⁷⁸ This left both companies without their directors. Whilst Polygoon/Profilti’s president B.D. Ochse was unavailable and was working for the Dutch government in exile, the reigns of both companies came into the hands of acting director Dirk Schuur.

But the government’s cease and desist order came at a time of disarray. After being isolated from the world for five years everyone wanted to know what was really happening in the Netherlands. The ministry of OKW, now responsible for most matters pertaining film, realized newsreels could fill this want of

⁷⁷ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv. nr 1298, rapport of the Centraal Beeld Archief to Prime Minister Gerbrandy and the appropriate agent of the Ministry of OKW, [date unknown, probably spring or summer 1945]

⁷⁸ Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 90.03, ‘Memorandum van C.S. Roem’; 90.04, ‘Polygoon in de bezetting’.

information. A temporary solution was found in August. It allowed Polygoon and Profilti to restart the production of newsreels in September 1945, under the condition that they did not show their logos or any affiliation with the news (i.e. the films were to be shown without any mention of who made them). However, another solution had to be found for the imminent problem of lack of leadership after the two directors were barred from their positions and to ensure that 'correct' news would be shown. For these problems, there was to be a *Beheerscommissie* (control committee) that would oversee the companies and the production of the news. The plan soon reached the RVD. Due to the informing opportunities provided by newsreels it was "extremely interested" in the production of the reels. After deliberation between head of the RVD film department Vriesman and director Brugmans they expressed their desire to the OKW that they wanted someone from the RVD in the new control committee. In the same letter explaining the RVD point of view, the head of the OKW film department L.J.K. van Dijk in reporting to his minister Hendrik Jan Reinink agreed with this RVD stance.⁷⁹

The control committee was installed on 1 November and consisted of Vriesman, van Dijk and director of a lacquer-factory A.M. Mees. It immediately ran into trouble with acting Schuur on the nature, tasks and powers of the control committee. Whereas Schuur saw the committee merely as an 'advisory' committee he could use for advise and ignore as he pleased, the committee saw his actions as interfering with the tasks of the larger purifying committee to 'make sure Dutch cinema functions properly' again. After this urgent letter for a clarification of their role, Schuur and the control committee soon received an answer from the president of the purification committee, A.C.N.P. Ruys. He left little room for interpretation and stated that the control committee had "full control over the content and composition of the films made by Polygoon/Profilti, including the newsreels. Also, the committee shall decide which films shall be made and what narratives will be recorded." This made it clear that the

⁷⁹ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 878, Letter from L.J.K. van Dijk to OKW Minister Hendrik Jan Reinink, 4 October 1945.

committee had complete control over the production and content of the Dutch newsreels.⁸⁰

With regards to international news, matters were slightly more complex. Before Polygoon/Profilti had struck deals with film rental agencies to also make an international newsreel starting in 1946, international news in the Netherlands was provided and regulated by Allied command (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, or SHAEF). In an appeal to the government newsreel editor Jo Levi pleaded to let Polygoon/Profilti pool foreign news under Dutch editing rather than to let foreign companies come in and deprive Dutch economy and determine what was shown, especially given the rather propagandistic and foreign nature of the Allied newsreels. Through exchanging newsreels with foreign companies the loss of currency would be kept to a minimum. In these matters, Polygoon/Profilti was very much dependent on government support and help.⁸¹

The Redactiecommissie

This plea struck a chord with the government, which at this time, along with the NBB, was also stuck in a conflict over the import of films and loss of revenue with the influential MPEA (Motion Picture Export Association), an association guarding the interests of five large American motion picture companies. As it recognized this problem, it also realized that the company could still not be left to their own devices, something that had come up in the interplay between Schuur and the control committee. When control over the production of the newsreels was given back to Polygoon/Profilti after the three month period of the control committee it was decided that the control committee would be transformed in a *Redactiecommissie* (editorial committee) which would server for an initial period of six months. This committee would have a less compulsory and more of an advisory nature. In determining the tasks of the successor with regards to Dutch news, Van Dijk considered the committee's role 'to determine

⁸⁰ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 878, Letter from L.J.K van Dijk to A.C.N.P Ruys, 27 November 1945; Letter from L.J.K. van Dijk to D. Schuur, 11 December 1945.

⁸¹ Ibidem, Letter and Rapport by Polygoon editor Joop Levi to Ministry of OKW, 17 December 1945.

what news was to be filmed, the manner in which it was to be filmed, to test the made items and bar them from the journal if they did not meet the requirements, the possible commissioning of external filmmakers for interesting items', and "furthermore performing all the tasks required to actually make sure the newsreels are topical and to increase the technical and esthetical standing of the reel." With regards to international news it had to test the foreign newsreels and decide what would be shown. He also suggested that the editorial committee would have no matter in accepting or judging news-suggestions sent by the RVD.⁸²

But the tasks and composition of the editorial committee were not easily set in stone. In a letter to OKW minister van Leeuw, head of the film department J.H.J. de Jong further discussed the nature of the editorial committee stating that it should have the power to "refuse items" and to "give orders to film events that are in the common interest" and that it should even have a say in the financial matters of Polygoon/Profilti because of the monopoly the company had in making newsreels for the Dutch public. And just as Landré wanted in the case of the RVD, de Jong suggested maintaining an OKW official in the committee.⁸³

And so the editorial committee was installed in February 1946 and more or less continued the work of its predecessor the control committee. It had to regulate the content of the newsreels, determine what should be filmed and to improve the content and the esthetics in order to further the nation's wellbeing.

For six months, the editorial committee operated under the auspices of the Dutch government. Then, in August 1946 banned directors Roem and van der Wilden were given a royal pardon and took over the editorial committee. As the committee had proven to be quite valuable to Polygoon as well, Polygoon decided to maintain the committee and invited the current members to maintain their position.

⁸² NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 878, Letter from van Dijk to [?] setting up the agenda for a meeting two days later, 22 January 1946.

⁸³ Ibidem, Letter from J.H.J. de Jong to minister van Leeuw, [exact date unknown, probably 18 March 1946].

The government and Polygoon/Profilti after the war

Immediately after the war the Dutch government intervened in the production of the newsreels by Polygoon/Profilti.

Its dealings were based on the ideas that existed among the government elite. Film was deemed a very influential medium that was best kept under control and which could prove to be very useful in explaining the government position.

It did so by installing a control committee and subsequent editorial committee which would guard the content of the newsreel and which would allow the newsreels to provide the public with proper information. With government representatives of both OKW and the RVD, the main government interests would now be guarded and the newsreels could be properly 'guided'

Over the next ten years the government kept running into Polygoon/Profilti. In the next two chapters we shall see how Polygoon/Profilti dealt with this government influence and how it saw its own position and role in society.

Chapter 4: Polygoon, the editorial committee and their values

With the editorial committee in place Polygoon/Profilti had received much more autonomy. Stemming from the previous control committee, the editorial committee had more or less the same task of guarding the newsreels and improving the quality thereof but now in an advisory capacity. The task of guarding the newsreel not only had an aesthetical dimension, but also a political one, as both van Dijk and Vriesman remained as representatives of the government. Within two years both men were replaced by their successors and more permanent government representatives, J.C. Schuller (OKW) and Gijs van der Wiel (RVD).

It is in the light of its responsibilities and given task that we will look at the newsreels and the editorial committee between 1946-1956. In this period the newsreels around the world reigned supreme as sources of audiovisual news. With its mission in place, the editorial committee tried to fulfill its tasks to create an aesthetically pleasing, culturally uplifting and informing newsreel as best as they could. In doing so the committee acted on several guiding principals. Over the next decade, some of these principles stayed the same whilst others changed. This chapter will investigate both the position of the Polygoon newsreels⁸⁴ in Dutch society and the way the editorial committee saw its role in creating these reels. It will also look at how the committee acted on these underlying values and assumptions. This is important if we want to see how far government influence on the production of newsreels went, as shared or contradictory values or issues between government and newsreels largely determined to what extent the government received cooperation, had to coerce Polygoon or was contradicted. However, these values will not entirely explain the relationship between government and Polygoon. We need to recognize there were also several personal ties between Polygoon and the government that weighed into the decision making process as well.

⁸⁴ Even though the company that produced the newsreels was Polygoon/Profilti, it was the Polygoon branch that was responsible for the production. For semantic purposes, I will refer to the newsreels as "Polygoon" newsreels

Personal ties with the government: Gijs van der Wiel and Joop Landré

One of the most typical aspects of Dutch politics and society in the first two decades after the war, after its fondness for bureaucracy, must be the exploitation of the personal ties between people. In almost every case after the war, a high government official had received his position because of an existing friendship with another high official or through the use of his network. Schemerhorn had his group of trustees that he brought to The Hague and they invited their friends and acquaintances to help in rebuilding the country. In the case of the newly formed ministry of General Affairs (of which the RVD was a part) most of the organization only existed on paper and was to a large extent staffed by people with no experience as a government official.⁸⁵ However, in the context of a country in ruins trying to overcome a plethora of problems this reliance on personal ties could sometimes be more of a blessing than a curse. Personal ties, for example those formed in the camp for political prisoners in Sint-Michielsgestel or through work for the government in exile or resistance meant that a strong bond of trust between the persons involved existed. Everyone had endured the same hardships and had more or less a similar outlook on what needed to happen, namely to purge society of 'wrong' elements and to rebuild it. These personal ties made it easier to get things done.

As we shall see several names can be identified to be important players in the field of government informing and the newsreel. The two most important people in the relationship between the government and Polygoon were Gijs van der Wiel and Joop Landré.

Gijs van der Wiel joined the RVD in 1945 at the age of 27. During the war he had repaired radios for the resistance and ended up at the film department, of which he quickly became the head. After working for the RVD for only several months van der Wiel received a position in the new government installed editorial committee as a replacement for RVD official Vriesman. In this capacity he would serve as the main link between government and Polygoon and could explain government views and suggest and defend government items during the

⁸⁵ Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 'G. van der Wiel, Hoofddirecteur RVD 1968-1982; Niet voor maar met de ministers,' in *Voor de eenheid van beleid, Beschouwingen ter gelegenheid van vijftig jaar Ministerie van Algemene Zaken* ('s-Gravenhage 1987), 276-288, there 279, 280.

meetings. Even though he could not vote on decisions with regards to the newsreels, he could, as a member of the editorial committee, voice his opinion on items, whether they were in a personal or governmental capacity.⁸⁶ After the initial six-month period of the editorial committee was over and Polygoon requested the committee stay active in its current form van der Wiel stayed on. Over the years van der Wiel became such an integral part of the editorial committee that he was asked in 1954 to remain on the committee for his “valued” cooperation, which he did. In the meantime, Drees also promoted van der Wiel to the position of Deputy Director of the RVD in June 1952, increasing his status within the government even further.⁸⁷ As we shall see in the next chapters van der Wiel, in his capacity as government representative on the editorial board, had to defend his and Polygoon’s position several times as his role was questioned by some in the BVC.

However, more important than van der Wiel’s position was the part played by Landré. More so than van der Wiel, Landré operated within an even smaller circle of the government elite. After his work for *Radio Herrijzend Nederland* Landré quickly rose to the top of the RVD. Here, Landré was in direct contact with (Prime) Ministers and other important officials. Over the years he (rather cunningly) increased his own position within the government and remained at the helm of the RVD after his ascension to the position in 1946. After becoming head of the informing counsel in May 1949 and press secretary of Drees he was also one of the founding fathers and first president of the BVC. As leading figure of the RVD he was invited to go on a tour through America, which was instigated by the American ‘Foreign Leadership Program’. This program was designed by the U.S. to instill American values and culture in foreign leaders in order to disseminate an anticommunist message. Whilst in America he met with important U.S. officials and talked about public affairs and psychological warfare. Here he also met head of Polygoon/Profilti, Brand Ochse, who offered him his job

⁸⁶ Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 25.02, Transcript of the documentary “‘Waar wij niet zijn is niets te doen”, 27.

⁸⁷ The editorial committee meeting archives are not made public. These can only be accessed after access is granted. Inv. nr 4250, Letter from Landré to van der Wiel, 18 January 1954; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr 6222, Decree from Prime Minister Drees, 14 June 1952.

as head of Polygoon/Profilti ⁸⁸ Landré accepted and became head of Polygoon/Profilti as of 1 September 1952 and stayed in this position until 1959. In his own words he accepted because Ochse doubled his current salary, but as Scott-Smith already pointed out, the timing of his transition is rather curious. Some sources indicate that a rumor of public indecency also played into the decision to leave the RVD. Whatever the case, Landré had thus far stood at the cradle of the RVD, the informing counsel and the BVC and had led them all, influencing the guiding principles of these organizations and in an extraordinary position of power. It was also at the height of the early cold war, during a time of uncertainty and fear for communism. As he acknowledged the informing value of the newsreel we can only speculate whether he took the reigns of Polygoon/Profilti in order to influence the newsreels or whether he did it for the money, fleeing accusations and a change of scenery. In any case, as president of the newsreel company, he did have a say in the direction of the newsreels and did retain his network of the elite group of officials.⁸⁹

As we shall see both Landré and van der Wiel inadvertently influenced the relationship between Polygoon and the government and the position the newsreels played in government informing efforts. In this respect, these two men are the common thread in the relationship between Polygoon and the government in the period under investigation.

The reach of Newsreels

⁸⁸ Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire, The U.S. State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain, 1950-1970* (Brussels 2008), 21, 126-128.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, 128; Article in 'Het Vaderland', 23 June 1952.

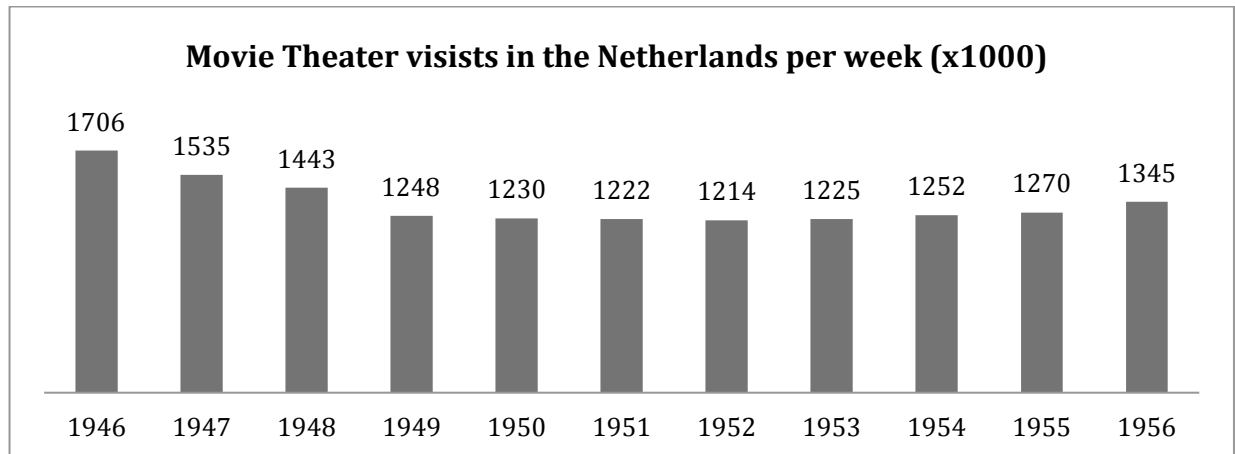


Chart 1: Movie Theater visits in the Netherlands per week between 1946-1956.⁹⁰

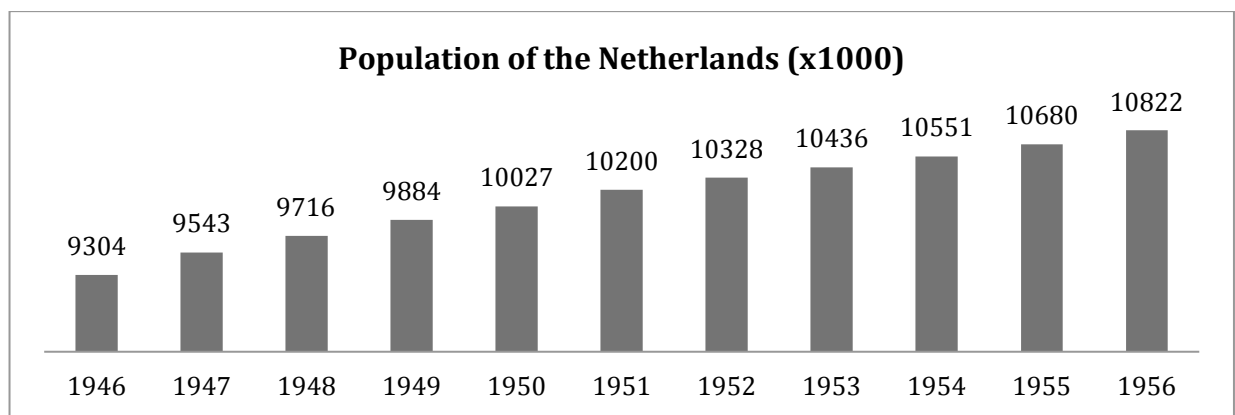


Chart 2: Population of the Netherlands between 1946-1956 x 1000.⁹¹

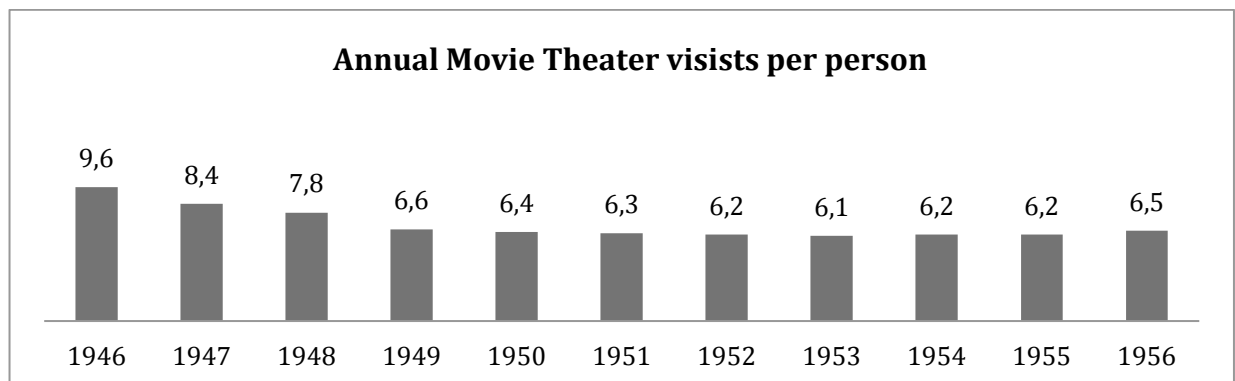


Chart 3: Annual Movie Theater visits per person between 1946-1956.⁹²

Charts 1 through 3 show the actual reach of the medium film after the war. With weekly movie theater visits running from 10 to 18% of the total population and average annual visits per person of at least six trips to the movies, movies were

⁹⁰ NBB year report 1951, 1956. Found in Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 42.02 and 48.02.

⁹¹ <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/bevolking/cijfers/default.htm>, accessed 30 September 2013.

⁹² NBB year report 1951, 1956; <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/bevolking/cijfers/default.htm>, accessed 30 September 2013.

very much a part of everyday life. These movie visits ranged from trips to see (predominantly Hollywood) blockbuster movies in regular movie theaters to documentaries to quick stops at the Cineacs, movie theaters that continuously showed newsreels and short animations.

In this landscape of film, theater exploiters often screened newsreels before the main movie and these were considered as a set event in any movie-going experience. This meant that the spread and reach of the newsreels in society easily ran into the millions each week. The copies were rented out to movie theaters and a single newsreel could circulate up to four weeks, slowly trickling down from big cities to small village and traveling theaters. Here it should also be noted that movie theaters did not exclusively show *one* newsreel, but could, as in the case of the Cineacs, show several different reels per week or, after 1948, leave out specific parts of the newsreels they did not want to be shown.

This spread, however, was not entirely covered by the Polygoon newsreels alone, and in that, not entirely filled with solely Dutch news either. In the Netherlands after the war Polygoon was not the only company that produced newsreels. After it was allowed to produce an international newsreel on 1 January 1946 it had to compete in this sphere of international news with the newsreel *De Wereld van Week tot Week* commissioned by the British company Eagle Lion (later British Gaumont, owned by major British film producer J. Arthur Rank) and, starting in 1947, *Fox Movietone News*, which was a combination of items produced by several American newsreel companies. Polygoon made two different newsreels: one completely produced by Polygoon, filled entirely with Dutch news and events called *Neêrlands Nieuws*, and one with foreign news, *Wereldnieuws*, which was assembled by exchanging items with newsreel companies from other countries.

But in spite of this competition with other newsreels, Polygoon was still the market leader with a reach of 80-90% of the movie theaters for *Neêrlands Nieuws* in the fifties and between 30-60% for *Wereldnieuws*.⁹³ This dominance of

⁹³ In the case of the *Wereldnieuws* market share increased from around 30% in 1946 to about 60% in 1954; Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels Across The World*, 83-84; Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 14.01, R. Gebhard, 'Verslag over de Filmjournaals in Nederland in 1953'; 14.01, R. Gebhard, 'Verslag over de Filmjournaals in Nederland in 1954'; 32.02, Press release 'Dertig Jaar Polygoon', 21 March 1950; NL-HaNA, OCV / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69,

Polygoon in the Dutch film industry can also be deduced by the fact that *Neêrlands Nieuws* alone had generated 4.7 million guilders in revenue between the liberation and 1950, making it the largest source of revenue for the Dutch film industry by far.⁹⁴

The reach and impact of the newsreels in society were even further magnified by the weekly reviews of the reels in newspapers and magazines and the occasional piece on Polygoon as a film production company. These reviews, undoubtedly raising the profile of Polygoon, served different purposes in different newspapers. In most cases they were descriptive, comparing the different newsreels and describing the content without any real additional remarks. However, when they were considered exceptionally well done they received praise and if they were sub-par they were critiqued. Only the communist paper *De Waarheid* would occasionally scold the newsreels for ‘twisting the truth’, ignoring the ‘communist influence’ and ‘following U.S. war-mongering reasoning’.⁹⁵

The production process

But before the public actually got to see the newsreels, a complex production process had preceded the screening. The production of the newsreels was no easy feat and the two newsreels produced by Polygoon required a different approach. For *Neêrlands Nieuws* film crews were sent to cover events, which were usually the previously described ‘scheduled events’.⁹⁶ As material was expensive and limited, and setting up filming equipment took time and effort, choosing which events were to be covered was quite important. On top of this, there was very little room for error for the film crews. Once dispatched, they had

inv.nr. 878, Letter from OKW minister Jos Gielen to Prime Minister Louis Beel, ‘Vertoning Journaals’, 18 April 1947.

⁹⁴ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 963, ‘Uiteenzetting betreffende de huidige positie van het filmwezen in Nederland’, ‘Bijlage VI, Opbrengst wegens verhuur in de bioscopen van Nederlandse films in de periode sinds de bevrijding tot en met 28 februari 1950’. Other sources of revenue were main movies (fl. 1.300.000) and program pictures (fl. 356.000).

⁹⁵ Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, boxes 49-55 contain scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings on Polygoon, film and the newsreels between 1946-1955. These books were made by Polygoon; The RVD also kept a book with clippings on “critiques on newsreels, 1949-1950”.

⁹⁶ R. Gebhard came to find 69% of the items in *Neêrlands Nieuws* in 1953 to be scheduled events, as opposed to 55% in *Wereldniews*.

to come back with something to work with. After filming, the editors had to quickly edit the raw material and provide it with commentary. The contracts made with the theater exploiters stipulated the newsreels had to be a minimum of 250-300 meters, roughly 10 minutes of film. When news was slow the so-called 'stoppers' or 'stock items' were used to fill the newsreel. These were of no real importance and were often non-topical and interchangeable. For the international *Wereldnieuws* Polygoon relied chiefly on its contract with the French Pathé Éclair company, which provided the bulk of the foreign items. Furthermore, Polygoon had established deals with companies in other countries to exchange material. Seeing as Polygoon was a commercial company, these deals saved it from having to buy these (expensive) items. After it received the foreign newsreels, the editors had to make a selection and translate the given commentary into Dutch. Once the master prints were finished between 100-200 copies had to be made to ship to the movie theaters.

So with the editors in charge of actually arranging the reels, selecting the items and providing them with commentary, what was the exact responsibility of the editorial committee? The editorial committee convened once a week to discuss the newsreels, during which both upcoming newsreels were screened and comments on the items were given. These meetings almost always happened in a collegial and amiable atmosphere. When a newsreel was deemed bad, the faults and shortcomings were pointed out and when it was good praise was given. When a topic was controversial or an issue or general problem came up, the committee debated on what was supposed to happen. The committee also evaluated requests made by committee members, the general public or the government to cover certain events and determined which events were to be filmed for next week's *Neêrlands Nieuws* and which would not be.⁹⁷ It is important to note that although the committee had the responsibility to screen and ban items if they were considered bad (in whatever way), it almost never did in practice, as it was usually impossible to re-film or film something else. On top of this it was also better to have a bad item, than to have no item at all and not be able to fulfill the contractual duties of providing a long enough newsreel. While

⁹⁷ The list of rejected items was often longer than the list of accepted ones. Reasons for rejecting items were not always given in the meeting minutes.

this may seem to negate the influence of the editorial committee, it certainly did not. Over the years, the values and critiques uttered in the committee meetings were picked up and used by the present editors and cinematographers Levi, Bloemendal and Stip, who then proceeded to pass these on to the camera crews. If mistakes were made, the critiques made sure these were not quickly repeated. The real influence of the editorial committee can therefore be seen over a longer period of time.

With this description of the factual production process in place we can now look at the values of the editorial committee.

The values of the editorial committee⁹⁸

As the committee convened for the first time on 6 February 1946, it immediately became clear each member came from a different background. In this initial meeting the committee consisted of the members of the preceding control committee A.M. Mees, L.J.K. van Dijk (OKW), D. Vriesman (RVD), but also of film critic and screenwriter Anton Koolhaas, acting director Dirk Schuur and other Polygoon/Profilti personnel Dirk Verwey (director) Walter Smith (director), Jo Levi (editor) and G. Bresser (attorney). Over the years, the committee shrank and mutated several times, changing both the composition and nature of the committee. Other members were to be: the RVD replacement for Vriesman. Gijs van der Wiel (starting 20 March 1946), the OKW replacement for van Dijk, J.C. Schuller (23 July 1946), editor of the catholic newspaper *De Volkskrant* J.M. Lückner (6 November 1946), Brand Ochse (1948/1949-1952, after which he often joined as acting president for Landré), Joop Landré (4 September 1952), screenwriter and director Kees Stip (somewhere between 1948-1952), editor and narrator Philip Bloemendal (11 September 1946), Profilti and Polygoon directors v.d. Wilden and Roem (21 August 1946, Roem took over Schuur's presidency of the committee).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ For this section I used the minutes of the editorial committee. Unfortunately, the minutes for the years 1948-51 are missing. This research is based on the years 1946-47 and 1952-56. As stated earlier, these archives are still not open for the general public. Hereafter I will only give the date of a meeting.

⁹⁹ These people represent the bulk of the members. As the years progressed and the meetings became routine the committee shrank. Some were present more often than others and in the case

Looking at the underlying values of the committee, we can differentiate four interconnected areas on which notions were held. These are: thoughts on the relation with the government and the role of the newsreel as an informing tool, thoughts on newsreels as cultural carriers with an educational responsibility, thoughts on newsreel as a journalistic medium and thoughts on the international situation and the cold war. The latter is treated separately in the next chapter.

The relationship with the government and the informing value of newsreels

As the editorial committee stemmed from the control committee and had a particular government installed task to report on Dutch events it is not coincidental that this relationship caused the most debate within the committee. In the first two years debates on RVD influence, government wishes and the position of Polygoon in these matters frequently reoccurred. The tone for these clashes was already set in the first meeting. After Vriesman stated that the newsreels ought to be more like the press (i.e. sensible to government informing) Schuur noted that the newsreels strive to be neutral. When Vriesman later in the same meeting uttered the notion that the newsreels should definitely follow government policy with regards to Indonesia, warning that if it did not, more newsreels might vie with Polygoon for screen time, Schuur was reportedly “[could not] share this opinion; he [deemed] the newsreels just like the press to be independent of government politics”.¹⁰⁰

Two weeks later, after the RVD decided to submit their own ‘sub-par’ item on the paper-scarcity, the committee unanimously decided not to include any items if they did not live up to the standard. In doing so, they had set a precedent for not blindly adopting government submitted film and asserted its position as independent company.¹⁰¹

This issue of informing the public on governmental matters can also be observed in the debates on colonial affairs. In the meeting of 20 March 1946 van der Wiel

of van de Wiel and Schuller, they were sometimes represented by other officials. Anton Koolhaas went to Indonesia between 1952-1955, but returned to the committee after his return. Brand Ochse frequently returned to the committee after his retirement in 1952, often as acting president instead of Landré.

¹⁰⁰ All the quotes and statements from the meetings are only noted by date. Meeting 6 February 1946.

¹⁰¹ Meeting 20 February 1946.

objected to an item on Soekarno that was specifically marked by the government not to be shown to the public. After the members agreed that they should be allowed to show material on Soekarno, they agreed that they would not do it in this particular case, as the government had given them this material and they 'had to respect the wishes of the creator'. However, if the material were to come from any other source, they stipulated, it would definitely be used.¹⁰² Two months later, this position was reaffirmed when van der Wiel remarked that the Ministry of Colonial affairs was unhappy about the way Indonesian items were shown and wanted to see and approve future items. Schuur strongly argued against this and said that if the editorial committee found an item on Indonesia interesting and good, it should be placed in the newsreel without any approval of any organization lest the newsreels be censored.¹⁰³ In August, when van der Wiel wanted to adopt a RVD film on 'the life of a soldier in Batavia' in the next newsreel, a debate ensued. The new president of the committee, Roem, slightly changed the position of the committee and pointed at the responsibility the newsreel had: "In principle we are prepared to show propaganda for the army in [Indonesia], provided that it is good propaganda. The committee is of the opinion that, with regards to the monopolistic character of the newsreel, extreme caution has to be taken as [hastily creating a newsreel item from a limited amount of material] can only damage the propagandistic nature." With this statement, the editorial committee refused to adopt the RVD item.¹⁰⁴ The issue resurfaced a year later. This time the committee agreed to use material sent by the colonial branch of the RVD, but only after re-editing the material so that the propagandistic nature had been neutralized in order to reflect the latest international developments. In this way they would provide an "objective and well-informed report on the police actions."¹⁰⁵

But where colonial matters were sensitive subjects that were often open for debate given the national importance of its content, other matters of propaganda were more clear-cut and not allowed. For example when the matter of using and exchanging items with Franco's fascist regime in Spain first came up, a request

¹⁰² Meeting 20 March 1946.

¹⁰³ Meeting 24 April 1946.

¹⁰⁴ Meeting 21 August 1946.

¹⁰⁵ Meeting 12 August 1947.

made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OKW representative van Dijk and film critic Koolhaas strongly opposed this request stating that the moral aspect of not trading with Franco's fascist regime trumped any commercial interests. These fascist propaganda films were not welcome in the Netherlands.¹⁰⁶ This aversion to propaganda was not only limited to fascist countries. Items on American or Russian/Eastern European matters, matters that were often similar in their propagandistic nature, were treated with the same caution.¹⁰⁷ Even if propaganda could be made to benefit the Netherlands it was deemed unacceptable. When Koolhaas remarked that an item on areas still in state of emergency a year after the war did not incline people to give their support to the areas in need, editor Jo Levi remarked "this was not the intention, seeing as no propaganda shall be placed in the newsreels."¹⁰⁸ This also applied to religious matters, subjects that were highly controversial in the pillarized society after the war.¹⁰⁹ Even though propaganda was out of the question, items that informed the people of the progress made after the war, such as rebuilding efforts, were deemed very important. However, an important part of this was also to focus on the positive aspects instead of the negative and even to not show issues (anymore) if they were considered too negative.¹¹⁰

Despite this attitude towards propaganda and the adherence to neutrality and objectivity, Polygoon still required government cooperation and could not blatantly refuse government requests at will. Even though suggested items were often unsuitable because they were "to propagandistic and annoying" and hard or impossible to film, refusing them was difficult. Not in the last part because Polygoon, especially in the first two years after the war, heavily depended on government and NBB cooperation with regards to the exploitation of its movies,

¹⁰⁶ Meeting 14 August 1946; 4 September 1946; 26 March 1947.

¹⁰⁷ Meeting 5 June 1946; 23 October 1946; 16 April 1947; 30 April 1947.

¹⁰⁸ Meeting 14 June 1946.

¹⁰⁹ Meeting 21 Augustus 1946; 13 November 1947; Dibbets, 'Het taboe van de Nederlandse Filmcultuur', 51.

¹¹⁰ Meeting 16 October 1946; In the meetings of 21 February, 28 February and 6 March 1952 the possibility of shooting an item on 'construction loans' is considered as Polygoon should pay attention to this, because of its nature as a "national problem"; In the meeting of 20 February 1946 editor Jo Levi wanted to do an item on the victims of the war, but the committee decided that "In general it is decided that we will not give this subject any attention in the newsreels."

currency issues, the censorship board, permission to film, cooperation by the authorities and in matters of export and exchanging material.¹¹¹

Over the years, this balance between government dependency and conviction to remain neutral and objective was tried on several occasions. After several incidents where the camera crews did not receive cooperation and after years of government badgering to promote certain events, Brand Ochse wrote a letter to OKW department head N.R.A. Vroom in June 1950 in which he iterated his disappointment after being misled and misused yet again. The straw that broke the camel's back was a proposed item on a "Parisian Week" in Arnhem. After several high officials pressured him to send out a film crew, the event itself turned out to be nothing more than a cheap publicity stunt for the city of Arnhem. In his letter Ochse bitterly stated that he did not take kindly to these "advertisement jokes" as the newsreels in his eyes "fulfill an important national task". Even the RVD and OKW representatives in the editorial committee understood that "it is not their task to look after the interests of their departments that want certain items adopted for the sake of publicity." He concluded his letter by expressing his frustration on the lack of government cooperation combined with a further lack of subsidizing on top of a very high double taxation. These matters had given rise to the feeling of injustice and unfairness amongst the employees of Polygoon/Profilti.¹¹²

Unfortunately for Polygoon the government did not quickly change its ways after the incidents. After having invited Polygoon to film Allied maneuvers in Belgium and the Netherlands in the summer of 1952, it failed to arrange further accommodations and cooperation, leaving the editorial committee with a poor item. The committee lamented: "despite our efforts [...] an item has been produced that perhaps is better off not being shown. Those who will see this item in the movie theaters will certainly not get the impression that the taxes collected for the defense efforts are well spent." A month later the Navy informing service had enticed the editorial committee to film a Royal Navy

¹¹¹ Meeting 20 February 1946; 20 March 1946; 26 June 1946. The movies "Walvis in Zicht" (1947) and "De Dijk is Dicht" (written by Anton Koolhaas, 1950) were both produced by Polygoon. "Walvis in zicht" had been commissioned by the government and "De Dijk is Dicht" had received government funding.

¹¹² NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 1273, Letter from B.D. Ochse to N.R.A. Vroom, 5 juni 1950.

rowing event. This also turned out to be overhyped, leading Roem to conclude that despite the RVD's help over the years in bettering its informing on events and communicating with local authorities "the informing by this party [the Navy informing service] can not be trusted anymore. [...] this type of informing only ensures that we will not soon again decide to cover these 'events'."¹¹³

However, these incidents and run-ins with the government did not mean Polygoon and the government did not cooperate. Often their views on what was important for the Netherlands, and therefor what Polygoon had to cover, coincided. Apart from several instances and conflicts in the earlier years when Polygoon had to establish itself as a newsmedium, the editorial committee often complied with government tip-offs. In 1951, BVC president Landré even estimated that the good relationship between government and Polygoon yielded positive results about 90% of the time. Four years later, van der Wiel reaffirmed the compliance of Polygoon to government desires to the BVC.¹¹⁴ This good relationship was partly the case because of the personal ties of the government representatives van der Wiel, van Dijk and Schuller, who were often part of the debates and, as we have seen earlier, were considered valued members in the committee. Van der Wiel even noted that discussions under Ochse always took place in an "openhearted and objective atmosphere."¹¹⁵ These positive personal relationships allowed for direct and strong ties between government and Polygoon.

Yet, it is clear that even though the committee understood the gravity of its task of informing the public on important matters such as the colonial struggle in Indonesia, or rebuilding progress, in the first two years of its existence the editorial committee and the government regularly clashed on *how* these messages should be brought. As blatant propaganda was not accepted, the editorial committee would usually appeal to its duty to remain objective and neutral, principles that were, as we shall see, leading in making the newsreels.¹¹⁶ The government often tipped the committee through its representatives or by going straight to directors Ochse or Landré, but never forced the committee to

¹¹³ Meeting 12 June 1952; 17 July 1952.

¹¹⁴ 31st BVC meeting, 3 September 1951; 150th BVC meeting 13 September 1955.

¹¹⁵ Meeting 25 September 1952.

¹¹⁶ 157th BVC Meeting, 13 December 1955.

adopt certain items. However, one can question to what extent values coincided and to what extent the committee felt forced to go along with government tips. As Ochse's letter pointed out, Polygoon would sometimes be pressured to film certain events. This mainly happened through personal ties. Because of Polygoon's dependence on government regulation and cooperation in all sorts of matters, not only the creation of newsreels, it benefited from keeping the relationship amicable.

National (cultural) value

Aside from the political aspect of government informing and government issued or suggested items there was also a large sense of cultural and educational responsibility towards the general public present in the editorial committee. This sentiment can be seen a main undercurrent in the decision-making process over the years. That this undercurrent existed is not at all surprising considering the aforementioned ideas on film as cultural carriers, the reasons for the establishment of the committee and the presence of both OKW representative van Dijk (and later Schuller) and film critic Anton Koolhaas. As the main proponent of culture, Koolhaas early on exuded the message to pay more attention to cultural events, which would "inform the Dutch audience", and less on the folk events, which made it look as if "all of the Netherlands are walking around like street musicians."¹¹⁷ Again, the first meeting can be seen as an indication of the cultural significance of the newsreels. In creating the newsreels all members agreed that the newsreel should be shown to as many people as possible, including children. It had to pass the film censorship board and should be seen by the entire Dutch movie going public.¹¹⁸

But what did the committee perceive to be some of the values that were tied to its cultural mission? We can discern four recurring themes in discussions on cultural matters: Aesthetics, education, morality and decency and, predominantly before the Netherlands joined NATO, anti-Americanism.

In the first two years after the war, the Polygoon newsreels underwent a difficult process of reinvention. The editorial committee played an important part herein

¹¹⁷ Meeting 6 February 1946; 28 May 1946.

¹¹⁸ Meeting 6 February 1946.

and was credited both at the time and later by many to have contributed greatly in this task. Items that did not live up to expectations, that were filmed or edited poorly, that did not have the proper sound or music or when they lacked general cinematographic qualities were provided with harsh and honest critiques, often expressed by film critic Koolhaas. Later, editor Philip Bloemendal claimed these critiques had helped him in improving the newsreels and to elevate them to a new level.¹¹⁹ A good example of the importance of aesthetics can be found in 1952, when several officers were decorated for their actions in the Korean War. Committee member Lückner bemoaned the dullness of Dutch military events and compared them to the far more visually attractive English ceremonies. Committee president Ochse agreed and asked Kees Stip, who had worked a lot with the Army Informing Service for his movie 'Home of the Free', to point out to the appropriate authorities that the military should take the factors that were "required for a good visual publication" into account. This example, along with other accounts show that the presentation of an item was often just as, if not more important than the actual message.¹²⁰ The visual aspect was actually so important that if an item was deemed too hard to be properly filmed, thus negating the actual information or message in the item, it was usually not covered at all or covered through a different medium than the newsreel.¹²¹

The editorial committee also strongly felt it as its mission to educate the people that viewed the newsreels. This did not just mean 'to inform' and to 'bring the news', but also to morally and culturally educate and uplift the people; to "strive to cultivate the good taste of the public."¹²² As learned men, the members of the committee regularly discussed whether or not a specific commentary, a joke or even an entire item should be left out of the newsreel because inclusion would 'lower the standing' of the reel. These debates also usually included gauging the intelligence of the common folk who would view the newsreel.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Meeting 8 May 1946; "Waar wij niet zijn is niets te doen", 27.

¹²⁰ Meeting 14 August 1952.

¹²¹ E.g. an item on currency smuggling which did not lend itself to easy visual representation, Meeting 24 July 1946.

¹²² Meeting 20 February 1946.

¹²³ Meeting 28 May 1946; 24 July 1946; 1 May 1952; 11 September 1952; 2 October 1952; 16 September 1954.

Tied to the value of educating on a cultural plane was the installment of 'proper morals' and common decency. The editorial committee was there to safeguard and improve the newsreels, but in trying to do so it operated in the context of a society divided by pillarization. In this age, the media adhered to this division and the press was divided along the same lines. Because the newsreels were not tied to *one* pillar, it had to ensure no one was offended by the news. In this situation Polygoon became, according to media historian Karel Dibbets, "a toothless tiger", a medium that could not fully editorialize. To prevent anyone from feeling hurt, the editorial committee had representatives of the pillars in the form of Joop Lückner, chief editor of the most influential catholic newspaper *De Volkskrant*, OKW representative Schuller as a protestant Christian and Koolhaas, who also worked for the progressive periodical *De Groene Amsterdammer*, representing the humanistic/social-democratic pillar. Kees Stip would later say he was there as a "pillarless" element.¹²⁴ Direct confrontations on the highly controversial topic of religion were therefore sparse. Looking at the items in the newsreels over the years, it is clear that items concerning religious, dogmatic or philosophical matters were usually not treated, and if they were, then only on a descriptive level. This can be seen by the amount of religious items in the newsreels in 1953 which amounted to a mere 0,8% of the items in *Neêrlands Niews* and 0,9% in *Wereldnieuws*.¹²⁵

The issue of common decency and humanity can best be found in the treatment of misery. In his analysis of the different newsreels, R. Gebhard in 1954 noted that the British and American newsreels were a bit "crueler" in their portrayal of emotion and misery, and that they did not refrain from showing the dramatic effects and pain of, for example, an earthquake. This can also be seen in Lückner's objection to images of cow cadavers after the big flood in 1953.¹²⁶

Lastly we can see quite a large disdain for (stopper) items that were "too American". These items, usually on harmless topics such as roller-skating, ice-skating, waterskiing, Easter, fashion or pageants were considered incompatible

¹²⁴ Dibbets, 'Het taboe van de Nederlandse Filmcultuur', 52; "'Waar wij niet zijn is niets te doen'", 27, 28; 150th BVC Meeting, 13 September 1955.

¹²⁵ E.g. a discussion on a catholic event in August 1946 led Koolhaas to state: "We cannot give support to the positive attempts of the Catholic Church to propagate their work", Meeting 21 August 1946; Gebhard, 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953'.

¹²⁶ Gebhard, 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953'; Meeting 5 February 1953.

or even harmful to Dutch culture, too sensationalist (a reproach also often expressed at the American *Fox Movietone* newsreels), and in the case of the pageant, even “disguised pornography.”¹²⁷ Sensationalism was considered a sin in the production of newsreels as it went against the value of neutrality and objectivity. In that sense it was almost as sinful as propaganda.¹²⁸ This disdain for America and its culture (or lack thereof) fits in the general consensus on film and culture and the problem of the foreign influence in the initial post war years. In the fifties we can definitely see that the Netherlands had warmed up a lot more to the idea of America as a protector than in the first two years after the war. Even though culturally they were still quite different, the new international situation now ensured a much friendlier outlook on the Americans.

In all, the cultural values of the editorial committee were very consistent with the broader values of the time, namely to promote culture in general, to promote good film, to protect the public from bad influences and to reinforce Dutch (cultural) values. In its doings the committee really had a strong sense of duty towards uplifting the standing of the movie going public. At his departure as president of the committee, Ochse worded this sentiment by praising the “constructive spirit within the editorial committee to continuously improve the newsreels, and to make sure that these newsreels have a healthy influence on the millions of Dutchmen who go to see the newsreels every week.”¹²⁹

Newsreels as a journalistic medium

The last major underlying value in the editorial committee was a strong sense of journalistic responsibility. Whereas historian Huub Wijfjes in his account of journalism in the Netherlands did not consider Polygoon to have any journalistic merit and wrote a single denigrating paragraph on the company’s doings in the landscape of journalism, the editorial committee at the time thought otherwise.¹³⁰ In their goals to inform and educate their audience the editorial committee frequently ran into the conflicting nature of the medium of newsreels. On the one hand, it was a medium that from the start wanted to provide the

¹²⁷ Meeting 4 September 1946; 16 April 1947, 3 July 1946; Gebhard, ‘Verslag over de filmjournaal 1953’, 38.

¹²⁸ Meeting 22 September 1955; Gebhard, ‘Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953’, 42.

¹²⁹ Meeting 25 September 1952.

¹³⁰ Huub Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 317, 318.

audience with real news on real events in Netherlands and the rest of the world, and the committee considered their role as journalists to be “not only that of a reporter, but of an editor as well.”¹³¹ To this extent Koolhaas and Schuur early on pleaded for the admittance of a real journalist in the committee, a position that would initially be filled by former *Radio Herrijzend Nederland* announcer Philip Bloemendal, and later by the accession of Joop Lückner to the committee.¹³² Eventually Polygoon succeeded in increasing its journalistic value, an achievement recognized both internally and externally. When former OKW minister van Leeuw spoke of the accomplishments of Polygoon on their 30th anniversary in 1950 he orated the importance of the newsreel and stated it was “just like a newspaper.” This sentiment was also voiced by NBB president J.G.J. Bosman at the same event, where he emphasized the enormous reach of the newsreels in society: “Weekly more than 1.250.000 people see this [film-] newspaper, which means you have a larger circulation than any weekly magazine there is.”¹³³ An important part of this journalistic responsibility were the aforementioned notions of neutrality and objectivity, especially considering the fact that Polygoon virtually had a monopoly on the Dutch newsreel market.¹³⁴

On the other hand the committee found that it could not solely bring news as people came to the movies for entertainment and distraction. The newsreels were a part of this experience and Polygoon was a commercial company. Therefore it also had to cater to this want.¹³⁵

In this respect there were four main considerations that prevented the committee from being a ‘true’ journalistic medium like the newspapers. The first were the ties to and reliance on the government, which inhibited the committee to act truly independent as government wishes had to be taken into account. Secondly, the technical limitations of the time restricted the coverage of Polygoon. As Polygoon had to assemble an entire crew and mobilize and use

¹³¹ Meeting 2 October 1946.

¹³² Meeting 6 February 1946; 6 March 1946.

¹³³ Meeting 15 October 1947; *Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon*, 13282, 32.01, ‘Rede van Prof. van der Leeuw’, 30 March 1950; *ibidem* 32.01, Speech by J.G.J. Bosman at Polygoon’s 30th anniversary, 30 March 1950

¹³⁴ Meeting 15 April 1954.

¹³⁵ 156th Meeting of the BVC, 5 December 1955.

expensive and cumbersome equipment it could not cover everything it wanted, was slow to respond and therefore had to rely largely on set events for their items. Thirdly, for its international newsreel it relied on external sources. Sometimes a shipment did not come through or the sent material was deemed inadequate. In these cases, the editors had to rely on 'stoppers' and stock items to fill the gaps, which were obviously no 'true' journalistic items.¹³⁶ Lastly, the balance that had to be sought between entertainment and news prohibited the committee from adopting solely news items, even though in the committee real news was always favored over entertainment items.¹³⁷

Whilst juggling these problems and despite the reality of having to create a commercially pleasing newsreel, journalistic integrity remained a value strongly felt. For example, in the case of the year overview of the 1954, journalist Lücker criticized the composer and editor (and cinematographer) Stip, who had used several quips and puns in his review, by saying that "if the newsreel abandons news, than that would mean a change of course of which [...] the editorial committee should be notified. The newsreels report; this grounding principle has been abandoned in this amusing short." After a debate ensued, president Landré concluded that he appreciated the sharp and honest critiques, but that the year overviews are the only time when Polygoon/Profilti can show its cinematographic side.¹³⁸

The value of journalistic integrity also kept reappearing in the discussions on the 'standard of the reel', as items should never dumb down the audience. This often conflicted with the fact that newsreels also had to be pleasing and entertaining.

A good example of having to be entertaining can be found in the frequent appearance of the Dutch royal family. With roughly 11% of the items in *Neêrlands Nieuws* in 1953 contained the royal family, only surpassed by Sports, Polygoon has often been predicated to be inherently pro-*Oranje* because of this high percentage. But according to the editorial committee, this mainly had to do with the enormous popularity of the royal family, which ensured the people's,

¹³⁶ Meeting 22 May 1946; 19 June 1946.

¹³⁷ In the editorial meeting of 28 May 1946, after Koolhaas made the statement to include more cultural events "to inform the people" Schuur responds by stating that this should be limited or else people will become averse towards the newsreels. Editor Levi then responds that real news takes up too much space anyway, and that these have priority.

¹³⁸ Underline in original, Meeting 31 December 1954.

and more importantly, the movie theater exploiter's satisfaction with the newsreels. Also, the royal family served as a supra-pillar institution which made their appearance an easy and safe item. Furthermore, according to Bloemendal, the royal family showed up to a lot of important events, inadvertently giving these events a royal signature.¹³⁹

It seems to be that as the years progressed, the committee did find a balance between entertaining items and actual news. Debates on the entertainment value and journalistic integrity lessened and by the time Landré took over in 1952, Polygoon had solidified its position as the predominant newsreel in theaters. The lessening of the debates might also have to do with the committee accepting the reality of its limitations. Yet as the debate on the year overview showed, the committee continuously kept thinking on the best balance between journalism and entertainment and consciously decided on the order and nature of the items.

In looking at the values of the editorial committee it becomes apparent that neutrality and objectivity were *the* underlying principles that guided the committee. Whether it was on government matters or questions on journalistic integrity, objectivity and neutrality reigned supreme. The government representatives in the committee could speak their piece, but the committee almost always had the final say as to what was filmed.¹⁴⁰ This principle was strongly felt as the committee saw the newsreels as a medium with a clear educational and cultural task, especially given the enormous reach amongst the population. The newsreels had to inform the public of what was happening in the Netherlands and in the world and had to enlighten and lift the cultural standing of the population. But parallel to the task of informing and the enlightenment of the public ran the commercial responsibility to sell the newsreel to as many movie theater exploiters as possible. Furthermore, the committee had to take into account the restrictive nature of the medium film, as it had to be watchable for every member of the pillarized society. Events also had to be filmable and aesthetically pleasing and on top of all these considerations Polygoon was

¹³⁹ 17 Juli 1952; "De Wereld van Polygoon", Time: 30:15.

¹⁴⁰ In all the meetings the committee was only overruled once by Landré when he decided against the wishes of the committee to admit an item on a car race. This was highly deplored by the rest of the committee, Meeting 23 June 1955.

limited by both the technical capabilities of its equipment and crews and by its reliance on government support. We can therefore see that the editorial committee had to constantly perform a complex balancing act between informing, educating and entertaining, an act that required skill and insight on the part of the editorial committee.

Chapter 5: Polygoon's views on the international situation and cold war issues.

With these considerations in place we can finally look at the outlooks of the committee on international (political) matters. As we shall see later on, the aforementioned BVC ran into the editorial committee on these matters on several occasions and tried to influence the nature of the reels. But before we can see how they tried to achieve this we need to see what the main ideas of the editorial committee on the international situation were, how they structured their newsreels accordingly and why and how their position changed over the years.

In reviewing the editorial committee's outlook on international affairs, we can see that the issues deemed important largely reflected the broader societal outlook and situation. In a temporal sense we can therefore divide the international outlook in two eras, the first running from the end of the war until about 1948, when the Netherlands had not really picked a side in the crystallizing bipolarity of international politics, and the second starting in 1948 until the aftermath of the Hungarian revolution, during which Polygoon increasingly accepted and promoted the Atlanticist stand.¹⁴¹

1946-1948, Neutrality

In the first period the committee quickly established that the national situation and national news had priority over international events. With a scarcity of material and a country in disarray, the national problems were of greater importance and deserved more attention than the international ones.¹⁴²

Nonetheless, a foreign newsreel had to be made, and the discussions on foreign events reveal several recurring thoughts. First of all, the overwhelming sense of neutrality and objectivity caused for great caution in selecting, editing and narrating items. Whether they were items on elections in Czechoslovakia, American Red Cross aid in Shanghai, Russian industry, Stalingrad, American Oil

¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, little can be said on the editorial committee between 1948-1951, as the meetings for these years seem to be lost.

¹⁴² Meeting 27 March 1946, 28 May 1946; 5 June 1946.

for Russia, demonstrations in Rio de Janeiro or Communism in Hollywood, they were all treated with care and caution and warnings were issued to 'beware of propaganda' and to 'refrain from political commentary'.¹⁴³ Also the discussions on admitting the newsreels from general Franco's Spain can be viewed in this light. Whether or not the newsreels escaped subjectivity is a different story. Because Polygoon relied on its exchange agreements largely with European countries, Eurocentric, colonialist and western biased news inadvertently slipped in the reels. It stands to reason that likeminded, western commentary was not filtered, and only blatant propaganda and 'American' sensationalism (obvious counterparts to objectivity and neutrality), originating from whatever source, were met with skepticism and refusal of admittance. In general, this policy reflected the Dutch course of neutrality, soberness and refusal to pick a side.

Another post-war value that had found its way in the committee was a feeling of war-weariness, something that showed in the objections made by Koolhaas and van Dijk to the excess of military items in the newsreel and the feelings of aversion towards "the madness of the atom bomb as a weapon."¹⁴⁴

The sentiment of neutrality applied less to colonial matters as the committee largely agreed on the necessity of showing items on Indonesia in the newsreel. As stated above, it did have some reservations on the rather propagandistic material emanating from the colonial informing services and wanted to have the final say in editing this material, but in general the committee found itself more than willing to show the public these important events in Indonesia.¹⁴⁵

1948-1956, NATO and the cold war

As the international situation changed, so did the notions of the editorial committee. As the Netherlands joined forces with Western European countries in 1948, had joined NATO in 1949 and had accepted help through the Marshall-plan the country received military material, joined in on joint military maneuvers and

¹⁴³ Meeting 5 June 1946; 16 April 1947; 30 April 1947; 23 July 1946; 13 November 1947; 18 December 1947.

¹⁴⁴ Meeting 13 February 1946; 3 April 1946; 31 July 1946.

¹⁴⁵ Meeting 6 March 1946; 3 April 1946; 9 October 1946. That the material was already biased before it even got to the Netherlands has been investigated by Gerda Jansen Hendriks.

went on an Atlanticist course. As we have seen, after the Korean War broke out worldwide tension began to rise and a communist invasion was now considered a real threat. As the fear of an invasion simmered down a little in 1951 the question on how to deal with communism and the communist threat remained. How did the changing international situation affect the editorial committee? Before we can answer this question it is interesting to see what the *actual* breakdown of the newsreel was for 1953 and 1954 according to content analysis done by a student of media studies, R. Gebhard.¹⁴⁶

	1953	1954
Northern Europe	3	2,5
Western Europe	60,8	48,5
Eastern Europe	2,1	2,5
Africa and the Middle East	5,6	8,2
Asia	10,8	12,7
North America	15,7	22,7
Middle- and South America	2,1	1

Table 1: Breakdown of items in percentages per part of the world in Polygoon's *Wereldnieuws* for the years 1953 and 1954.¹⁴⁷

	1953	1954
Sport	16,5	14,3
Fashion	0,2	0
(Natural) Disasters	6,3	8
Strikes, demonstrations, clashes	2,4	2,3
Social topics	0,9	0,8
Youth, education	0,9	2
Arts, music, hobbies, exposes	1,7	1,3

¹⁴⁶ The study was inspired by the 1952 UNESCO report on newsreels and was done two years in a row under the supervision of a professor. His findings compared the four newsreels that were shown in the Netherlands and broke them down into categories and analyzed them.

¹⁴⁷ Gebhard, 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953'; Gebhard 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1954'. Asia has high percentages because of items on Korea, a new exchange agreement with India and the war in Indo-China.

Folklore, national traditions	3,4	3,1
Religion	0,9	1,5
Aviation	4,1	5,9
Naval items	2,9	3,9
Other scientific and technical subjects	4,6	4,4
United Nations	1,2	0,8
European Unification	1,4	1,8
Politics (except U.N. and Europe)	8,5	8,6
Military items	5,6	6,2
Celebrities (Royal)	11,4	7,8
Celebrities (Authorities)	9,7	8,8
Celebrities (other)	5,8	7,3
Animals	2,6	3,4
Extraordinary items	0,4	0
Others	7,5	7,8

Table 2: Breakdown of topics in percentages for Polygoon's *Wereldnieuws* in 1953 and 1954.¹⁴⁸

As tables 1 and 2 show the breakdown of the *Wereldnieuws* newsreel, several biases become apparent. First of all, the majority of items, about 75-80% deal with events in the western world. This is not so strange, as the exchange agreements made by Polygoon were predominantly with western companies. It follows that although blatant propaganda was still not allowed, casual and recurring items were admitted and over the course of the years were not often questioned. This ensured a very western-centric take on world events. Tied to this, we can see that there is a large absence of items from Eastern Europe. Even though Polygoon had an exchange agreement with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia, hardly any items from these countries seemed to make it to the reels. If we put this in a cold war framework we can see almost ten times as much items on/from North America as there were on/from the Soviet Union, even thirty times as much if we include Western Europe in this dichotomy. Thirdly, if we

¹⁴⁸ Gebhard, 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953'; Gebhard 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1954'. As Gebhard himself already points out, it is quite hard to group certain items in only one category. Sometimes, an item can belong to two or more, in which case Gebhard looked at the main focus of the item. He does not claim to have the *right* indexation.

look at the subject matter, we can see that the categories on aviation, navy, science, U.N., European unification, politics, military and authority celebrities together compose of roughly one third of the subject matter. If we look even closer at the items in these categories we see a predominance of the military aspect, such as the donation of military equipment (in the categories aviation and naval), generals visiting, new military inventions, wars and other items that can be considered quite militaristic. Here, the nature of newsreels covering scheduled events plays an important part.

It is important to note that even though statistical analysis reveals a clear western bias, the committee did hold on their journalistic values and duties. The committee remained very skeptical towards anything that seemed to contain propaganda. For example an item that was submitted by the office coordinating the Marshall-plan was refused for its propagandistic nature, much to the dismay of the E.R.P. agent who proceeded to complain to the NBB, OKW and the RVD, emphasizing the national importance of the Marshall-help.¹⁴⁹

Also in accordance with their notions on objectivity, commentary on any item was kept as neutral and unbiased as possible. Accordingly, the western bias hardly occurred at the level of commentary. However, as the tables show, it *did* occur at the higher level of supply and selection by the editorial committee.

As the years had gone by, the editorial committee had gotten into the routine of meeting and commenting the newsreels. A general consensus seemed to have been reached on what was good and what was bad. And as the committee had been at it for several years, by 1952 most items the committee considered most items to have been covered very nicely. Comments on the items usually stuck to positive sentences such as 'nice routine subject', 'interesting' and 'fascinating' sometimes with added comments on the cinematography or narration. The explicit debates of 1946-47 seemed to have disappeared and the consensus on Eastern European items was that most of the sent material contained blatant propaganda, and should therefore not be shown.¹⁵⁰ However this did not mean there was no interest in Eastern Europe. In May 1952 the committee agreed that

¹⁴⁹ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 975, Letter from K. Logher (Motion Picture Specialist of the Information Office of the Economic Cooperation Administration) to the NBB, OKW and RVD, 12 September 1950.

¹⁵⁰ Gebhard, 'Verslag over de filmjournaals 1953'; 157th BVC Meeting, 13 December 1955.

there were no fundamental objections to showing items from “behind the iron curtain”, as long as they were “original”. This sentiment was repeated more than a year later by van der Wiel when he stated that “in general we need to pay a fair amount of attention to the East, and we can also not forget Eastern European topics.”¹⁵¹ Items on communism that did make it into the newsreels and that did not strictly adhere to the neutrality principle, such as the treatment of the death of the communist Czechoslovakian president Gottwald in 1953 or a Russian folk dance theater visiting the Netherlands in 1954 could expect comments that it was ‘too favorable’ to the communists or that it was another “propaganda-stunt.”¹⁵²

But what is most striking is not just the large absence of ‘communist’ items, but the overwhelming presence of ‘pro-western’ or ‘Atlanticist’ items and the acceptance of and agreement on these items. Foreign topics on summits, defense, military demonstrations, military equipment and other events that with hindsight can be identified as ‘cold war topics’ were regularly returning items, and often described as ‘routine’, ‘well done’ and ‘important current event’. Because of this it is not surprising that there was a strong Western bias among the members of the committee, who viewed the reels week in and week out. In a secret meeting with the BVC at the end of 1955, Landré even openly admitted that Polygoon purposefully showed a lot of American news and took a pro-NATO stance.¹⁵³

Something that had remained the same over the years was the strong aversion (but simultaneous fascination with) to any threat of war, actual fighting or nuclear weapons. Items on nuclear weapons were often described with sentences such as “horrible topic”, “A very oppressive topic” or “A frightening topic” and were treated with gravity.¹⁵⁴

But the issue of communist items in the newsreels eventually became a bigger problem once the Soviet Union went into a new course of cultural approach after the death of Stalin. This did not immediately lead to an increase in communist

¹⁵¹ Meeting 1 May 1952, the comment is in response to the item: “Russian Whaler back in Odessa”; 22 October 1953.

¹⁵² Meeting 9 April 1953; 15 April 1954.

¹⁵³ 157th BVC Meeting, 13 December 1955.

¹⁵⁴ Meeting 17 September 1953; 8 April 1954; 24 March 1955; 7 April 1955.

items. Only after the 'Big Four' Geneva Summit of July 1955 did the problem become pressing. The new items after the summit had lost their obvious propagandistic edge. In a meeting on 11 August 1955, three different items 'from behind the Iron Curtain' had been put in a reel by the editors, something to which the committee members gravely objected. A month later in the debate on an item on German chancellor Adenauer visiting Moscow one of the committee members openly wondered whether it was such a good idea to pay so much attention to what was happening 'behind the curtain': "Especially the reportages that have been issued ever since the commencement of the so-called smiling politics could give the audience too optimistic of a view on the practices in the people democracies." Landré concurred and explained that the committee ought to be careful in admitting these items; nevertheless he also found that "the newsreel is a news medium and that it accordingly has the duty to show important news, wherever in the world this may be." In the end, the committee agreed with these words, but warned that the "border of what is acceptable" should not be crossed.¹⁵⁵

Over the next few months, these debates kept reoccurring. Merely a month later, van der Wiel and Koolhaas rued the admittance of two items from behind the curtain. Again, Landré disagreed with the warnings and stated that the two items would "have absolutely no detrimental propagandistic effect on the movie going public".¹⁵⁶ Another month later, Van der Wiel and Lücker chastised editors of the year review (Bloemendal and Stip) for having an 'Atom bomb complex' and showing too much violence and fear. Landré, yet again, reminded them that this had been the reality of 1955. Bloemendal chimed in with Landré, saying that the Russian cultural offensive had been intentionally ridiculed.¹⁵⁷

Apparently these debates had some effect on the committee members. A week after debating the year review, Lücker, Koolhaas and Stip convinced government representatives van der Wiel and Schuller that it was imperative to show the Soviet visit to India, as this was an important current event that could not simply be ignored because of a disliking towards communism and the Soviet Union. This pleased Landré greatly and he wanted to state for the record that "Polygoon does

¹⁵⁵ Meeting 11 August 1955; 22 September 1955.

¹⁵⁶ Meeting 1 December 1955.

¹⁵⁷ Meeting 29 December 1955.

not have any political task. Personally [I am] of the opinion that burying our heads in the sand or muting or twisting hard facts can be far more detrimental than facing reality, provided that this can be shown objectively and with reason.” All members agreed with this statement.¹⁵⁸ It appears that this had considerably settled the spirit of the committee.

With the exception of mutual visits of squadrons of Dutch ships to Leningrad and Soviet ships to the Netherlands in July of 1956, which shortly reignited the debate on propaganda. In the debate on the fleet visits, both Koolhaas and van der Wiel were of the opinion that Polygoon had been influenced by Soviet propaganda. But again Landré disagreed as this event was news that had to be covered. Stip intervened and, after agreeing with both sides, stated that it was not always possible to escape making *some* form of propaganda. The committee now seemed to be in agreement on how to deal with the international situation, namely to keep treating it as news.¹⁵⁹

That the committee had reached consensus can be seen by looking at the treatment of the Suez crisis and the Hungarian revolt in the committee. In these matters the committee responded very matter-of-factly and had no real additional comments. The follow-up items on Hungarian refugees or the situation in the Middle East also did not spark up any debate. As the cultural offensive was now over, there was no confusion as to the intentions of the Soviets any more, a fact that had been made clear by the public outbursts of rage and protest in the Netherlands.

In reviewing the editorial committee’s views we can see that the committee was well aware of its power to shape peoples opinion. It decided its policies accordingly and always kept the audience in mind. This becomes clear in all the debates on the items on the Soviet cultural offensive and communism. As the items are shown, editorial members wonder if the newsreels might show ‘too much’ or too positive communist items. Furthermore, whilst it definitely had a pro-NATO stance, it is apparent that the western bias was even greater than the committee realized. Not only did the foreign reels have a biased nature, but

¹⁵⁸ Meeting 5 January 1956.

¹⁵⁹ Meeting 27 July 1956; 2 August 1956.

added to this was also the lopsided supply of material by western (colonial) powers, which furthered the Western bias of the reels even more.¹⁶⁰

We can therefore say that on cold war matters the committee both unconsciously and consciously decided to exclude or include certain items in order to influence the public. Consciously it picked which items were acceptable and which ones were not. In deciding this, the committee mainly acted on the existing ideas on their journalistic responsibilities of neutrality and objectivity and on their commercial nature. Unconsciously it was largely unaware of, or indifferent towards the existing bias that already existed in the foreign newsreels and through the skewed nature of the exchange agreements. Furthermore it acted within the framework of the contemporary Dutch societal viewpoints and international outlook.

¹⁶⁰ In hindsight, some of the American items were covertly influenced by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to show a pro-American/anti-communist image; Parry-Giles, "Camouflaged" Propaganda'.

Chapter 6: The (international) newsreel and the government

With the values of the editorial committee investigated we also have to look at external factors that influenced the newsreels before we can make any final assumptions on government influence. Both the external perceptions on Polygoon's newsreels and the accompanying pressures exerted on Polygoon by the government influenced the direction of the reels. As governing ideas on film and newsreel stemming from the wartime experience and the renewal thoughts on informing underlined government policy, the reality of the situation also influenced the actions taken. The focus on this chapter is predominantly on the government's involvement with the international newsreels, as this was the area of the cold war and the area where the government a lot to gain.

This chapter will discuss the (perceived) importance of the newsreels in an international setting and the actions taken by the government to influence Polygoon and/or the reels. This international setting can roughly be divided into three periods: 1946-1948, when Polygoon's international *Wereldnieuws* was struggling to compete with other newsreels; 1948-1951, when the Treaty of Brussels and the new international situation caused for more cooperation between the pact members and 1951-1956, when the threat of communism resulted in an even larger urgency to utilize newsreels and the BVC saw it as its role to point this out to the editorial committee. As we shall see, the last period will be of most interest, as the BVC actively tried to influence the public and saw newsreels as one of the ways to do so.

The importance of the international Newsreel '46-'48

After 1945, Polygoon produced both a domestic and an international newsreel . As a result its importance was rising. As the previous chapters showed, the commonly held assumptions on the importance of film and newsreels as cultural and informational carriers led to the creation of the editorial committee, which largely adopted these notions. It became clear that the Polygoon newsreels on the Netherlands were essential in promoting Dutch culture in the damaged post-war society. In the previously mentioned speech by ex-OKW minister van der Leeuw, he also emphasized the cultural significance of Polygoon's news: "With

the newsreel we have something in front of us which, without any reservations, is of national importance. It strengthens our national consciousness in an inconspicuous, yet very effective manner. [...] the Dutch newsreel truly ties us all together.”¹⁶¹

These views of a newsreel as a cultural and informing tool were also extended to the realm of the international newsreels, where they served a double purpose. On the one hand they showed the Dutch people events from across the world, and on the other the exchange of items meant that Dutch culture and a positive image of the Netherlands (propaganda) was exported to other countries.¹⁶² But in this realm, even more was at stake because of the international competition facing Polygoon and currency issues. As the Netherlands tried to stabilize its film industry after the war it found that the provision of international news was largely in hands of the British Eagle Lion news. It had taken over the rental agreements established by SHAEF right after the war and had a market share of 66% in 1946, compared to Polygoon’s *Wereldnieuws*’s 33%. Not a favorable situation in the light of the commonly held stance on foreign influence. In order to control this foreign influence, and to combat the deficit imbalance (as money was flowing from the Netherlands to other countries through the rental agreements), the government, along with the NBB wanted to pool both Eagle Lion and Polygoon’s international and Dutch news together under one unified editorial committee. As 1946 progressed, the negotiations between the NBB, Eagle Lion, and Polygoon/Profilti remained fruitless, and a newsreel pool did not come into existence.¹⁶³

This did not mean that the problems had ceased to exist. In 1947, with the arrival of the American Fox Movietone News, the three international newsreels had equal shares of copies circulating. Not only did this mean that there was an even larger trade deficit imbalance, but also that the Dutch movie going public had to see the “colored” international news “through a foreign perspective”. As the

¹⁶¹ Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon, 13282, 32.01, ‘Rede van Prof. van der Leeuw’, February/March 1950.

¹⁶² In this context of the exchange of items ‘propaganda’ in means ‘advertisement’ for the Netherlands.

¹⁶³ Within Polygoon’s editorial committee these negotiations were met with some resistance. Acting director Schuur opposed the ideas of the NBB, which decrease the influence of Dutch news within the reels; Meeting 28 May 1946.

competition grew, Polygoon found itself in a tight spot. The company could only buy newsreel items for a small set amount (fl. 100.000) a year and had to get the rest of their items through trade agreements. By the end of 1947, the Polygoon management even wanted to cease production of *Wereldnieuws* as it lost customers to the foreign newsreel companies. If this were to happen it would put the Dutch government in an even worse position for several reasons. Not only would the newsreels be susceptible to even more foreign commentary and would the government lose money, but it would also mean losing its informing abilities abroad (through exporting the Dutch items), damaging the frail Dutch film industry even further and paving the way for other (Eastern European) companies to show their newsreels in the Netherlands without having to deal with any form of the editorial committee.¹⁶⁴

As this situation would be very detrimental to the Dutch government, OKW minister Gielen urged for protective measures for the Dutch produced newsreels. These could either be a “positive measure to protect the national [newsreel]” by forcing the foreign companies to pool all their items, which would be combined into one newsreel made by an independent editorial committee or by forcing theater owners to show *Neêrlands Nieuws* if they wanted to show any other foreign newsreel. Eventually two measures were taken to protect Polygoon’s newsreels. First of all the Dutch newsreels would be promoted by reducing the entertainment tax for theaters that showed Dutch (produced) newsreels or documentaries as part of their program (35% instead of 45% of their revenue). Secondly, foreign newsreel agencies could now no longer film items in or on the Netherlands unless they were of great international importance, effectively creating a monopoly on Dutch news (which then could be traded for foreign news) for Polygoon.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 878, Memorandum from OKW minister Jos Gielen to Prime Ministers Louis Beel, 18 April 1947; NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 975, concept Memorandum regarding foreign newsreels from Jos Gielen to Louis Beel, 12 dec 1947.

¹⁶⁵ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 878, concept memorandum from Gielen to the cabinet, 14 October 1947; *Ibidem*, concept memorandum from Gielen to the cabinet, [date unknown]

The changing importance of the international newsreel '48-'51

As this problem was now in essence solved and Polygoon continued to make the international newsreels, a new challenge arose. With the signing of the Brussels treaty on 17 March 1948 the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France and the United Kingdom sought to create a tighter unity between the countries in order to better protect themselves. As a part of this pact, there was also the creation of a Cultural committee in August 1948 to promote the cultural exchange needed to create a tighter unity between the countries. Within this committee, a subcommittee on newsreels, headed by OKW secretary-general H.J. Reinink, was also founded and met for the first time on 15 and 16 June 1949. It was tasked to promote cultural awareness of the pact-members by using the newsreels to inform the population. To this extent government customs barriers on import first had to be removed and a course of action had to be set out. The Dutch delegation in this sub-committee consisted of head of the OKW arts department N.R.A. Vroom, NBB president J.G.J. Bosman, head of the RVD film department Gijs van der Wiel and head of Polygoon/Profilti B.D. Ochse. In all these men could be considered the highest authorities on newsreels in the Netherlands.¹⁶⁶

After determining the value of the newsreels in shaping a "common public opinion", it was suggested in September 1949 that the newsreel editors of the five countries of the Brussels pact should meet to talk about the importance of the newsreel and to come with recommendations for cooperation. This conference was scheduled on 2-4 May 1950. In a press release after the meeting the meeting had "expressed its unanimous desire that the newsreels should play a full part in achieving the objects of the Brussels Treaty." It came up with four recommendations that asked for: the recognition of the importance and influence of the newsreel by the governments; the necessity of properly informing the newsreel companies of upcoming international events of interest; the importance of granting the proper authorization to newsreel companies; and that the governments aided the missions of the newsreel companies by stating that: "[given] the fact that the strength of Western Union depends manifestly on

¹⁶⁶ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr. 896, letter from ministry of OKW to E. Star Busman, Secretary-General of the Brussels Treaty Permanent Commission, 11 June 1949.

psychological factors, the meeting calls upon the Permanent Commission to organize events likely to present pictorial opportunities for newsreels, and the press.”¹⁶⁷

The Cultural Committee largely accepted these recommendations in November 1950 and agreed on the “exceptional influence” of newsreels. It also saw a lack of cooperation between the newsreel companies and urged that newsreel companies should visit their counterparts in other countries and wanted to further cooperation between these companies.¹⁶⁸

In the end, the cooperation attempts only resulted in several communal items on cultural events. Because there was no clear consensus or central coordinating body, the scope of the items and the cooperation between newsreel companies remained limited.¹⁶⁹ In any case, what can be said about these events is that these talks and meetings reaffirmed the importance of the newsreel in the new international setting. By using them to create a sense of unity and a “common public opinion” the countries wanted to increase the understanding of the Treaty and the necessity of international cooperation. A good example for this is a letter from Polygoon/Profilti president D.B. Ochse to editorial committee member and OKW official J.C. Schuller a month after the meeting of newsreel editors. In his letter he notes that not only military events pertaining the defense of Western Europe deserved a place in the newsreels, but also cultural events that signified “other facets of cooperation in the context of the Brussels Treaty”. By this he referred to a particular Youth Manifestation. However, after discussing it with his editors, he formally requested that the OKW change the program so that it would become a ‘pictorial event’ for the newsreel. Despite his official request the suggestion was not adopted. In trying to make the most of the situation he did offer to collaborate with the French and Belgian newsreel companies that

¹⁶⁷ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr 896, confidential memorandum from Dutch ambassador in London Bentinck to Foreign Affairs minister Dirk Stikker, 24 September 1949; Ibidem, Press release by the Brussels Treaty Organisation Information Service, 5 May 1950; Ibidem, ‘Recommendations to The Brussels Treaty Permanent Commission’, 11 May 1950.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem, Confidential report to the Brussels Treaty Permanent Commission, ‘Secretary-General’s Report to the Tenth Session of the Consultative Council on the work of the Cultural Committee’, 25 November 1950.

¹⁶⁹ Appendix to the 110th BVC Meeting, 1 September 1953.

covered similar events in their countries to make a short film that could still “multiply the useful effect of these gatherings.”¹⁷⁰

The international change at the start of the 1950’s

With the increasing encroachment of communism and the accompanying threat of an invasion building up in the late forties the issue of actually using the newsreels as an informing tool became more and more of a reality. The Brussels Treaty meetings, which recommended the use of newsreels for the unification and psychological defense activities, had now basically underlined the importance and necessity of using the newsreels in informing the public and had basically sanctioned this as well.

As we have seen, the editorial committee sometimes got into debates with government representatives van Dijk, Schuller and van der Wiel. Through personal ties and tip-offs, the editorial committee also sometimes adopted several government events. As its representatives on the editorial committee were there by free will and on a personal basis, and government and Polygoon values largely coincided the government respected and wanted to maintain the image of the editorial committee as being independent. In all of this, and in the matters of pooling the newsreels and cooperating between countries, the government never coerced Polygoon.¹⁷¹

But this line changed with the installation of the BVC as a result of the Korean War. As we have seen, the BVC had to explain increased NATO defense expenditures in a period of rebuilding and had to increase the moral defensibility of the Dutch population against communism. Traditional government values on the independence of news mediums started to get warped and the idea of ‘the greater good’ now began to trump all other considerations on propaganda and informing. Especially within the circles of the military the defensibility of the country and morale were considered to be of greater importance than personal opinions and individuality.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ NL-HaNA, OCW / Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers, 2.14.69, inv.nr 896, Letter from D.B. Ochse to J.C. Schuller, 6 June 1950; Ibidem, Letter from D.B. Ochse to N.R.A. Vroom, 17 July 1950.

¹⁷¹ Meeting 10 January 1952.

¹⁷² Baudet, *Het Vierde Wapen*, 210-212.

But as directly influencing the population was still a very sore subject given the recent history of occupation and propaganda, all of this had to be done in secret and with a focus on the positive nature of democracy instead of the negative side of communism. The nature of the informing at first mainly pertained to the European unification (Treaty of Brussels), the United Nations and Marshall help. Already before Korea started, this already gradually shifted more towards military cooperation and NATO. After Korea, these items became more and more frequent.¹⁷³

The BVC and the Newsreel '51-'56

With regard to the newsreels as an informing medium the BVC over the years definitely exerted their influence and tried to steer the newsreels. In a secret memorandum from 1967, then ex-RVD director G.J. Lammers, who took over the RVD and the BVC from Landré in September 1952, gave a short history of the workings of the BVC between 1951 and 1963. In his history he tells: "The BVC was also intensively involved with radio and film, especially the newsreels. We tried to ban communist propaganda and promote positive broadcasts."¹⁷⁴ But how did they go about this? What were the considerations regarding Polygoon and the Dutch and world news broadcasts?

With its attention and informing efforts spread out over the fields of a digest, the promotion of the civil defense organization, private organizations, contingency plans, and direct contact with opinion leaders there initially seemed to be very little attention given by the six (later five) members of the committee to the newsreel. In his memorandum to Drees in May 1951, Landré gives a first indication of the role of the newsreels. After determining that "government informing relies heavily on the representatives of the free press" he says of the newsreels that they could "incidentally" be used. Through the government representatives in the editorial committee certain items could be promoted, but "*only if the editorial committee agrees*".¹⁷⁵ So from the start Landré noted the

¹⁷³ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, 'Memorandum inzake overheidsvoorlichting in Nederland over de internationale samenwerking', 5 December 1952.

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem, Memorandum from G.J. Lammers.

¹⁷⁵ My emphasis, NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 1746, Memorandum from Landré to Drees, 28 May 1951.

importance of free press and the necessity of convincing the people who created media. In the case of Polygoon's editorial committee it helped that they already had personal connections in the form of Ochse, van der Wiel and Schuller. J.M. Lückner, editor of *De Volkskrant* and catholic editorial committee member was also one of the first public opinion leaders who were asked to brainstorm on the way the BVC should go about their business.¹⁷⁶ If we look at more personal ties, we can see that Polygoon editor and narrator came to Polygoon after his work as announcer for *Radio Herrijzend Nederland*, the same radio station Landré had worked for. Another tie between the BVC and Polygoon was the film made by Kees Stip: 'Home of the Free'. After determining that making an anti-communist movie was not a divergence of the 'no-anti-communist-propaganda' course, the BVC commissioned Polygoon, and more specifically writer and director Kees Stip, to make the film for the sum of 20,000 guilders. Over the next couple of months, Kees Stip attended parts of several meetings. If we add the fact that Landré switched careers in September 1952 from head of the BVC to head of Polygoon, we see an extensive network of personal and professional connections between the two organizations.

This collaboration seemed to work just fine over the next five years, with the exception of a minor incident in September 1951. After Army Informing official Major G.P. Kiès had requested van der Wiel to admit an item on Allied maneuvers in Germany Polygoon refused, much to the dismay of Kiès. In a searing letter to Landré, he stated the importance of the maneuvers to the Netherlands and went on to question the insight of the editorial committee and wanted to discuss the matter in the upcoming BVC meeting. He was even considering "making the embarrassing step" to ask the Economic Cooperation Administration (responsible for distributing Marshall welfare) to film the event if Polygoon continued to refuse. After Kiès reiterated his frustration in the meeting, Landré calmly explained that the event was considered too hard to film properly and that there was no intentional denial of the request. Forcing Polygoon to film the event would only have a detrimental effect on the good relationship between the government and Polygoon. Keeping these relations healthy and good was a feeling also shared by committee member J. Breunis. A week later the issue was

¹⁷⁶ 5th BVC Meeting 24 April 1951.

resolved, but not according to Kiès's liking, who again stated the task Polygoon should have in covering this event of national importance. Landré again argued against this and declared: "no complaint can be made in the few, rare cases that Polygoon denies a government request." The committee agreed, but still wanted Landré to talk with the editorial committee on the importance of defense events, all the while respecting the editorial committee's freedom to determine as they saw fit. This seemed to have subdued Kiès's frustrations.¹⁷⁷

And so the BVC continued its work. Over the year, business was as usual. In September 1952, three weeks after Landré had left and his successor G.J. Lammers had taken over, the committee felt the need for "regular contact with advisors from the private sector" to "on the one hand gauge their informing needs and on the other hand to slow down the free informing on topics in which the public opinion has gotten ahead of themselves." On the top of the list of advisors was Landré, now president of Polygoon.¹⁷⁸ In the first meeting with the advisors on 13 October the BVC was very honest in its intentions towards the advisors, with whom they wanted to discuss the best way to inform the public on "the heightened defense spending and the deterring of totalitarian systems." It encouraged the private informers to openly provide "healthy" criticism on the government so that it did not appear that the population was straightjacketed. By this method, the BVC tried to get the private informing sector on par with their attempts. Over the next years, more of these meetings were held to discuss important matters pertaining to communism, in which it was clear that the BVC wanted the private sector to maintain the same line as the BVC.¹⁷⁹

After the inception of the contact meetings with the private advisors, newsreels were hardly discussed during the next three years that followed. Now that Landré ran Polygoon, there was hardly any need for the BVC to question the course of Polygoon. Between September 1952 and August 1955, the only times Polygoon really came up were in an appendix to a meeting made by van der Wiel

¹⁷⁷ NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11746, Letter from Kiès to Landré, 3 September 1951; 31st BVC Meeting, 3 September 1951; 32nd BVC Meeting, 6 September 1951; 33rd BVC Meeting, 10 September 1951.

¹⁷⁸ Other advisors were union leaders M. Weisglas and J.A. Middelhuis, Federation of Journalists leader L. Hanekroot, editor of the newspaper *Parool* P.J. Koets, influential radio presenter Gerard Hoek and F.E. Hollander of the institute to promote the Civil Defense organization (and founding father of the BVC); 77th BVC Meeting, 22 September 1952.

¹⁷⁹ 1st BVC 'contact' Meeting, 13 October 1952.

in September 1953 when he stated the importance of newsreels in informing and the possibility of a NATO-led effort to coordinate the newsreels, much like the meetings under the Treaty of Brussels¹⁸⁰ and when Kees Stip in October 1953 politely declined to make a sequel to his earlier movie.¹⁸¹

This all changed after the Geneva Summit of July 1955. Once again it was Kiès who started the agitation against Polygoon. After seeing a *Wereldnieuws* newsreel on 25 August, he wrote a confidential memorandum to Lammers the very next day to express his dissatisfaction with the admitted items, which had been too pro-communist. He wanted the BVC to discuss the international détente that had formed after the conference and the matter of Polygoon and the admission of the communist items in its newsreels, as “Polygoon [did] not know how to discriminate [important] matters.”¹⁸²

In the BVC meeting two weeks later the issue resulted in a debate between van der Wiel, who was called to answer the questions posed by Kiès and BVC members Hoogwater (Economic Affairs), D.J.F. De Man (the Foreign Affairs replacement for H.F. Eschauzier) and Kiès. The latter asserted that the government should have more influence on the editorial committee, that Polygoon did not contribute to the “weakening of communist propaganda” and that aside from Lücker, the editorial committee lacked anybody with the proper authority or knowledge of international matters to make sound and weighed decisions. After van der Wiel countered these allegations committee president Lammers deferred the question of Polygoon’s loyalty, negligence and its role in fighting communism to a later date.¹⁸³

A month later, the question of détente was treated in the 8th contact meeting between the BVC and the public opinion leaders. De Man explained that there was a fear that the events of the last months and the recent Soviet activities had lulled the public opinion in a false sense of security and ease, which might eventually turn against the high defense expenditure. After the other advisors

¹⁸⁰ Appendix to the 110th BVC Meeting, 1 September 1953.

¹⁸¹ As reasons for his refusal he objected the harsh, irreconcilable message of the movie that was not in line with the new direction of the Soviet Union after the recent death of Stalin; NL-HaNA, Kabinet Minister-President, 2.03.01, inv.nr. 11746, Letter from BVC secretary H.W. Spoor to Lammers, 21 October 1953.

¹⁸² Ibidem, Memorandum from Kiès to Lammers, 26 August 1955.

¹⁸³ 150th BVC Meeting, 13 September 1955.

expressed that public opinion would not sway that easily and that there was still a lot of skepticism amongst the population toward the Soviet advances Landré chimed in. He felt that informing matters should be viewed in a little bit more down-to-earth fashion. If nobody would make any concessions in the East-West conflict, it *would* inevitably lead to a conflict. In this atmosphere, the BVC should focus on the details and remove the wind from the communist sails (i.e. show them in a lesser light by showing the Soviet grandeur and pageantry). In the case of the newsreels, he already did this by showing the grand dinners hosted by the communists, which would “give the laborers something to think about.” In the end, although consensus had been reached over the false intentions of the communists, the question on how to deal with protecting the people from the communist film propaganda remained.¹⁸⁴

The question soon enough resurfaced when Polygoon aired images of a visit of a Soviet Navy squadron to Portsmouth. In a letter from De Man to Lammers, De Man pointed at the different images in Polygoon’s newsreel and that of Gaumont British. In his view, Polygoon’s reel showed a fraternizing aspect that was absent in the British one. In his opinion it was clear that “unless the editorial committee [...] does not succeed in providing a politically responsible adaptation of these events, we should conceive of other measures to bring Polygoon to reason.” More than a month later, during which time van der Wiel responded to the allegations, explaining most of them were out of Polygoon’s control, and assured that from now on, Landré would personally oversee any Eastern European item himself, the matter was treated in the BVC.

During the meeting on 6 December, the committee was divided in its judgment of Polygoon. President Lammers and head of the Agriculture and Fishery informing branch Breunis were of the opinion that Polygoon did its best to limit items from Eastern Europe and that the editorial committee’s role was purely advisory. It did not have the responsibility to give political advice to the editors, who still remained completely independent. Kiès did not accept this line of reasoning and saw a general lack of political insight in the editorial committee. He questioned the presence of van der Wiel in the editorial committee, as his presence did nothing to help the government’s point of view. According to Kiès, “a government

¹⁸⁴ 152nd BVC Meeting/8th contact meeting, 11 October 1955.

member should possess enough prestige to convince others if need be.” If he did not, then it would be better to not have a government representative at all, to maintain the idea that Polygoon was truly independent. To this line of reasoning Breunis disagreed. Even though you did not need a government representative to relay requests (something Breunis always did by going directly to the director: Landré), it was useful to have someone defend the aesthetic and cultural value of items from a governmental perspective. The meeting ended with the compromise to invite Landré to explain Polygoon’s side of the argument and to see what the political position of the newsreels was.¹⁸⁵

Landré vs. the BVC

And so it was that a week later Landré sat in on the meeting that was entirely devoted to Polygoon and its views on its responsibilities regarding informing on international politics and communism. Again it was Kiès who immediately pointed at the lack of responsibility that Polygoon seemed to take as an informing medium, and that his personal dealings with radio and press had been much more fruitful. Breunis continued this line and asked Landré what Polygoon’s underlying code of conduct was in editing and composing the newsreel. After explaining the workings of the editorial committee and its main values, Landré bitterly reacted to the accusations that Polygoon did not have the countries best interest at heart by not admitting more political items: “The government, who – thankfully – does not pay anything, who furthermore taxes us for ridiculous amounts of money and who often hinders filming does not have any say in this.” And while, “this [did] not mean that Polygoon [did] not want to cooperate in generating publicity for National Dutch efforts, not only for the defense efforts, but also the rebuilding efforts, water management, etc” it also did not mean that Polygoon was explicitly obliged to pay attention to government items. When Kiès responded that it *did* have a moral obligation to do so, Landré replied that Polygoon already fulfilled this obligation.

On the international newsreels Landré explained the difficulties with and reliance on foreign providers and that Polygoon tried to balance the news as best

¹⁸⁵ 156th BVC Meeting, 6 December 1955.

they could. Concerning the precarious East-West relations, Landré reiterated his statement from the contact meeting, saying that it is best to mock the communists and to keep the wind from their sails. When asked whether Polygoon should play a role in informing the people on the East-West dichotomy, Landré would not know how. "Polygoon gives a lot of American news, including items on arming. On European items Polygoon takes the NATO side and spends a necessary amount of items on NATO-subjects. [I] am not prepared to state that in America everything is A-okay and that in Russia it is all bad news and that we should not admit any items from behind the iron curtain no matter what [...] We do not need to silence [the East]; nor take an aggressive political stance; but we must use ratio and caution in admitting certain items from behind the iron curtain and more items from America and other NATO-countries, especially with regards to NATO-efforts." Yet this explanation did not seem to satisfy the BVC. Breunis, Kiès and De Man still thought Polygoon had been tricked by the cunning propagandists of the Soviets. Trying to get people to laugh at the communists was not the way to go according to Breunis, the BVC wanted peoples alarms to go off, saying "over there is a dictatorship!" In their minds, Polygoon did not lay it on thick enough. And here seemed to be the crux in the difference between press and the BVC. The BVC still considered the Netherlands to be "in some state of war, at least on a propagandistic level" whereas Landré saw that all of the press considered the international situation in a state of détente.¹⁸⁶

Although the meeting did not seem to have led to any further consolidation between Polygoon and the BVC or acceptance to admit more government items, the meeting did change the perspective of most of the BVC members. In the following meeting only Kiès did not see any benefit of continuing to cooperate with Polygoon. He disdainfully considered Polygoon to only serve its commercial interest. The rest of the committee did not share this feeling. De Man was convinced that the technical aspects of producing a newsreel limited Polygoon's capabilities, and that trying to forcefully influence Polygoon would only have adverse effects. Breunis agreed with De Man, and the proposed idea of putting a political member in the editorial committee would not be advisable. Finally Lammers summarized the BVC's stance: "Under the current, given circumstances

¹⁸⁶ 157th BVC Meeting, 13 December 1955.

we can only achieve something by talking and persuading, unless we would want a nationalized [newsreel] company. By not wanting to speak to Polygoon we would fail in our capacity as informers with regards to an important medium of publicity.” The committee agreed that talking to Landré had clarified the situation and that further contact with Polygoon was deemed “desirable.”¹⁸⁷

With these BVC debates on Polygoon concluded, we see that the BVC did have *some* influence over the newsreels in that it could use its influence and personal ties to suggest certain items.¹⁸⁸ However, that it did not have control over Polygoon. With Landré defending Polygoon’s interests, the BVC could not easily intimidate or hold sway over Polygoon’s content and doings. Landré had created the BVC and had stood at the center of government informing efforts for seven years. He understood the importance of informing and, as he stated, was prepared to accommodate some government suggestions. However, he was not prepared to let his company be coerced in being the government’s mouthpiece. Right at the start of his presidency of the BVC he proclaimed the importance of free press and how the BVC should not make the same mistakes the RVD made in 1945. After he left the BVC for Polygoon, it seems that he kept this mindset and that his ideas on the free press were even further reinforced. Being a part of the free press meant standing up for the values you believe in, especially in this era of (international) tension. The BVC on her part eventually seemed to reside in this position as well. Even though Kiès, an apparent anti-communist hardliner, had very little sympathy for the reasons posited by Landré why Polygoon could not and would not blindly admit government items or to do as the BVC pleased the rest of the committee could understand Polygoon’s position and decided that talking and persuading were better alternatives than coercing.

Over the years we can see how the government influenced or tried to influence Polygoon/Profilti for its own betterment. In the first three years after the war it mainly helped Polygoon/Profilti by establishing trade agreements and

¹⁸⁷ 158th BVC Meeting, 29 December 1955.

¹⁸⁸ A correlation can be seen in van der Wiel’s position in the debates on détente. After having faced the BVC late 1955 his arguments and general position in the editorial committee seemed to have become more anti-communist.

protecting the international newsreels against its competitors. With the international context of the time and the common notions on foreign influence in film the government's position became rather protective. After the attempts to pool all the international newsreels failed and after some more conflict with the MPEA over import tariffs the government decided to promote the *Wereldnieuws* by implementing rules and taxes that were more favorable towards Polygoon/Profilti than the other newsreel companies.

As the international situation changed cooperation between countries in order to protect themselves became a necessity. The Treaty of Brussels already called for further cooperation between five European countries and, more importantly, warranted the use of the influential medium of newsreels to promote the unification ideas and ideals inherent in the pact. These ideas were picked up on by both the government and Polygoon/Profilti and both saw the importance of the principles established in the meetings.

But what really changed the relationship between government and Polygoon/Profilti were the events that took place after the Korean War started. With the inception of the BVC and an increasing sense of urgency of strengthening Dutch moral defensibility the idea that newsreels could be used for this task began to hold sway. The influential nature of the newsreels was once more agreed upon and Polygoon/Profilti. For a long time the relationship between government and Polygoon/Profilti was good as both were on the same wavelength when it came to the treatment of cold war events. The government tipped the editorial committee on upcoming events and the editorial committee often followed up on these events. Only when détente fully set in after the Geneva Summit did the views of the rather anti-communist BVC clash with those of the news company Polygoon/Profilti. Certain members of the BVC proceeded to question the loyalty of Polygoon/Profilti because of its 'soft' treatment of communist items. In the end, they found that their former president, Landré, was too headstrong to be bullied into blindly accepting the government's position.

Analysis

If we look at the entire period under review, what can we now say on the relationship between the Dutch government and newsreels and the conception and position of the newsreel in matters of informing (and even propaganda) in the first decade after WWII and especially in an early cold war setting? I will first give a short review of the era and its underlying values. Then I will try to see what factors caused the similarities and differences between the government's position and that of Polygoon/Profilti.

1945-1948

World War II had left the Netherlands in ruins. Materially, physically and psychologically the country had been severely damaged and it was up to the new transitional government to start rebuilding the country. This not only meant rebuilding destroyed cities, but also restoring Dutch culture and psyche, which had suffered five years of occupation and oppression. The events of WWII had shown that propaganda and public opinion had become an important aspect of the modern age. During the war, the Netherlands had gotten rid of its pre-war divisions in its unified contempt and fight against the Germans. These sentiments were further fueled by resistance press and radio. On the other side, the Germans had overtly used and influenced press, radio and film to propagate their side.

These experiences of unity and the power of information and propaganda were not lost on the first post-war government. It immediately set about to create a government informing service (RVD) that had to inform the public of government efforts and which had to disseminate and fortify the importance of rebuilding efforts and to explain the sacrifices that had to be made.

In this respect film was seen as a very important and powerful medium. Film was considered to hold a powerful sway over people's opinions. It could define and reinforce culture and could strongly influence and even mold public opinion. Especially newsreels, an informational medium with a reach of millions each week, could be very useful in helping the government propagate its ideas and

views. When it was decided that the only two major Dutch film production companies Polygoon and Profilti had collaborated with the Germans during the war, the production of their newsreels was initially ceased. After three months however, it became evident that a Dutch newsreel was necessary to inform the people on what was happening. As Polygoon/Profilti had collaborated with the Germans, it could not be trusted to make a newsreel without supervision. A three-man control committee was established, which included two government representatives: one from the ministry of Education, Arts and Science (OKW) and one from the RVD. The men had to ensure both the quality of the newsreels and the adherence to government views. After three months, the control committee was converted to an editorial committee, allowing Polygoon/Profilti more freedom in choosing and admitting items. The position of the government representatives was kept, although the members themselves were replaced quite soon. After six months, in August 1946, the editorial committee was no longer a government committee, but a Polygoon one. The members stayed on board at the request of Polygoon.

Meanwhile, changing ideas on government informing and propaganda changed the course set out by Schemerhorn. Due to the German occupation, a large aversion to direct informing and propaganda existed among the population. The changes in informing policy caused the RVD to lose its post-war significance, and the service was reduced to a technical and coordinating role.

In the first few years after the war the new relationship between government and Polygoon/Profilti was tested on several occasions. First of all, Polygoon had to balance its position in the new situation. As the foundational ideas behind the control committee and editorial committee were unmistakable, the premise of the new newsreel had become one of national importance. It had a national responsibility to inform and a cultural responsibility to educate and uplift. On top of this it had a commercial responsibility to entertain. Secondly, Polygoon had to operate in a time of scarcity and competition with foreign newsreels. It relied on the government for rules and regulation on matters of import and export and competition. The government on her side relied on Polygoon to produce a newsreel that promoted (and unified) Dutch culture, informed the public of progress made, could be used as 'propaganda' for the Netherlands

abroad and could counter the encroaching foreign influence of the British and American newsreels, which would undoubtedly harm Dutch culture. After overcoming differences of opinion within the editorial committee and after the government 'saved' Polygoon's international newsreel, the relationship between the two seemed to be amiable. In general Polygoon's view on what events were of national importance and deemed newsreel worthy coincided with that of the government.

Yet the editorial committee did not shy away from not filming government events if they were deemed contradictory to any of the values upheld by the committee. After the initial phase of chaos and adjustment, the committee quickly established several guiding principles and values on which they based their decisions and critiques. Whilst continuously having to strike a balance between informing, educating and entertaining it mainly sought to be objective, neutral and journalistic, all in the context of a pillarized society and with technical limitations. Items could therefore definitely not contain blatant propaganda, even if they would reinforce national interest. The committee realized the power and influence of newsreels and was often very aware and careful of this. It specifically did not want to be sensational or political, leaving the interpretation of the items up to the people. This position was relatively easy to maintain in the first few years after the war, when the Netherlands itself largely refrained from picking a side.

1948-1956

But this all changed after 1948. As the cold war dichotomy was crystalizing the Netherlands let go of its neutrality and adopted an Atlanticist stance, After signing the Treaty of Brussels in 1948 it joined NATO in 1949, which opened up the possibility of receiving American money to rebuild society. Fear of communism had caused Western Europe and later America to join forces. Between 1948 and 1950 the countries started to cooperate on an increasingly larger scale, first with the treaty of Brussels and then with the onset of NATO. Initially this cooperation was limited to financial support and military cooperation, but soon military supplies and talks of combined defense plans

came into play. After the communist North Korean invasion of the south in June 1950 a sense of urgency was added to the fear of communism. With increased military expenditure the current informing situation was deemed inadequate as the government felt that the people did not really understand why money had to be spent on defense instead of on rebuilding efforts. In the mind of the government this ignorance could then be exploited by a communist 'fifth column'. After investigating the problem, RVD head Landré, along with other high informing officials suggested the creation of a special committee in charge of coordinating informing efforts. Thus, the BVC was created. Over the next few years this committee actively tried to bend public opinion into a pro-NATO, pro-Atlanticist and anticommunist stance through the use of personal ties and news mediums. One of these mediums was the newsreel.

On the side of Polygoon the change in the international situation also led to several changes in presenting the newsreels. The editorial committee had gotten into a routine and through the cooperation with newsreel companies from other countries it understood its significance in the new international situation. With everyone being aware of the importance and power of newsreels and international tensions running high, there seemed to be an agreement on which course to sail. With the majority of the material originating from Western Allies and the importance of NATO felt, the committee supported the broad societal pro-western consensus. Furthermore, with two government representatives (three after the ascension of Landré) in the committee, the committee undoubtedly agreed with general government policy and general societal notions and feelings towards communism.

For years both Polygoon and the BVC were on the same wavelength. Polygoon kept communist items to a minimum and the BVC kept fighting communism through other means. Only after the change in Soviet diplomacy after the Geneva Summit of 1955 did the two collide. The new situation had raised a new question on how to deal with this diplomacy. In the case of Polygoon several committee members wondered *if*, and if so *how much* or *how* items from 'behind the iron curtain' should be shown, as they could lead the public to believe that the Soviets were not that bad after all. In the case of the BVC the feeling was that *no* items should be shown, as they definitely *would* instill positive ideas on the

communists. From the BVC point of view, Polygoon did not live up to its national responsibility of properly informing the public, and as a result its loyalty came into question.

In both cases it was Landré who settled matters. Within the editorial committee he posited that 'news was news' and that if something happens, it was Polygoon's journalistic duty to report that in an objective and unbiased way. News should not be hidden. Before the BVC he also defended this position, stating that Polygoon already did its part to promote NATO-values and generally agreed with the government stance, but he also asserted that the feelings of several members were simply not valid. He defended his position of reporting the news as it came by claiming that the Soviet diplomacy and concurring acts only undermined the image of communism. Even though 1956 was an eventful year, with the exchange of a squadron of ships in July and the Suez crisis in the summer and Hungarian Revolution in November, there were no more large debates in either committee on how to deal with communism. With this, the matter seemed to be resolved and no actions were undertaken in either committee that drastically changed the course of the newsreel.

Shared values and government influence

When we want to look at the symbiotic relationship between the Dutch government and the newsreel we have to factor in several ideas that weigh in on determining the influence the government had on the newsreel, in how far they could use it for their own message and how Polygoon saw its position.

First and foremost is the nature of the editorial committee. As a direct result of government measures and due to the nature and gravity of its task to inform and educate the people on matters of national importance, the members of the editorial committee immediately had a sense of responsibility and importance. Even after the six-month government regulated period, the committee remained in existence, for it was clear how important this organization was to the quality newsreel. The responsibilities felt remained a part of the committee's psyche, even though it was now no longer a government institution. These feelings and sense of duty did not just appear out of thin air, but can be traced back to the

general ideas on film that existed at the time. Especially in government circles, but also cinematographers themselves considered film and newsreels to have enormous influential powers on culture and public opinion, something best illustrated by the aversion towards the foreign films and the detrimental effects they would have on Dutch society. These ideas also extended to the editorial committee.

Secondly, the war had left everybody with a shared experience, had unified the country and had provided an opportunity to reshape society. Both government and Polygoon saw the need to keep this unified mentality alive, to create and show a distinctly Dutch culture. Views on what was important for the country by the government and Polygoon often coincided. This was not just true right after the war, but for almost the entire decade as Polygoon reflected societal events and had several direct personal ties to the government. Only in 1955, after the Geneva Summit did the government and Polygoon clash head-on on the nature of informing and the role of Polygoon.

A third, very important element can be found in the personal ties between Polygoon and the government. Again, the inception of the editorial committee was a brainchild of government agents. OKW officials Van Dijk and De Jong and RVD man Vriesman and Landré were all involved in creating and approving the nature of the committee. With Polygoon/Profilti president Ochse being an important player in the post-war Dutch film industry, having worked for the Dutch government in exile, the ties between government and Polygoon ran deep. Ties remained deep and got even deeper as the head of the RVD film department van der Wiel joined the editorial committee, followed a year later by OKW official Schuller. Other examples are Kees Stip, Philip Bloemendal, Joseph Lückner, the people involved in the international cooperation in the matter of the Treaty of Brussels and the other ties when the government worked with Polygoon. What really connected the government with Polygoon however was Landré's switch from head of the RVD and head of the BVC to head of Polygoon, creating a strong connection between the realms of government informing and private informing. The personal ties served as a means for different members of the government to get items into the newsreels. While this did not always work, as the editorial

committee still had to consent to filming an event, it can safely be said that it did increase the amount of government or pro-Europe/NATO items.

A fourth factor that was detrimental to the relationship can be found in the overplaying of the personal ties and in the non-cooperation by the government. Especially in the first five or six years, Polygoon felt the government frequently hindered their operations or gave bad information on an event. The feeling that the newsreel was used as a vehicle for propaganda purposes by the utilization of personal ties did not appear often, but when it did, it was met with disdain. Not providing adequate cooperation for filming or letting local authorities know Polygoon was going to film was also not met with enthusiasm.

But the largest factor in determining influence is the journalistic nature felt by the editorial committee versus the need for informing on the government's side. Over the years the values of neutrality and objectivity within the editorial committee became increasingly important. In the beginning the government installed committee struggled with its own journalistic integrity and government origin. But over the years it increasingly stood up for its values. Government items could be admitted, but under no circumstances could propaganda be a part of these items. This aversion to propaganda can be explained by both Polygoon's own experiences during the war, when it was being forced(/coerced) to collaborate with the Germans and the broader societal aversion to propaganda, also stemming from the wartime experience.

In all we can detect a very complex dynamic in the symbiotic relationship between government and Polygoon/Profilti. On one side we have a government guided by new ideas after the war on informing and the necessity of creating a new country. In these attempts it saw the potential of film and specifically the newsreel as an informing tool that could be used to reach its goals. By utilizing personal ties within the editorial committee and the president of Polygoon himself (both Ochse and Landré) and by sharing similar outlooks on informing, educating and the international situation the newsreels coverage generally coincided with government views and values. In this, the government was aided by the limitations of the newsreels, the reliance of Polygoon on government support and their reliance on 'scheduled events' in creating the newsreels, a field

in which the government was prolific. Later on, as thoughts on informing and propaganda changed it still found Polygoon to be a trusted ally, generally in line with the broad societal consensus and even with the views of the government. This can be explained by the presence of (ex-)government officials in the editorial committee. Only after the Geneva Summit did the government, in the form of the anticommunist BVC, run into a conflict with Polygoon as the ideas on informing, communism and the role of Polygoon in informing the public differed with those of Polygoon.

On the other side we have a newsreel company that after the war wanted to reinvent itself. With the help of the government it became an important part of the cultural life and a large proponent of Dutch culture and of information. Whilst juggling the three considerations of informing, educating and entertaining its audience it took its role in society and its role as a news medium very serious. A large part of its responsibilities, namely to inform and educate were not just bequeathed by the government and the first control and editorial committee but were also largely in agreement with its journalistic responsibilities as a news medium. However, A large part of these journalistic responsibilities were to remain objective and neutral and to not show blatant propaganda. These values, along with remaining aesthetically pleasing, did not always coincide with government wishes.

In several instances, the government's needs clashed with Polygoon's wants, in which case Polygoon always had the final say on what was admitted in the newsreels. Usually however these were minor clashes, and the relationship remained largely positive. Only in 1955, after the Geneva Summit, was the clash so great that the two could not find a consensus. With the headstrong Landré at the helm of Polygoon, the BVC had no choice but to accept Polygoon's explanation that it was not up to the government to admit or refuse certain items and that it should trust Polygoon's judgment. So while Polygoon agreed with the government most of the time and even had to rely on it for certain matter outside of Polygoon's control, it did not blindly follow government policy or film government events. Furthermore, even though over the years Polygoon always vehemently opposed blatant propaganda it had less trouble with, was unaware

of or even turned a blind eye to the subtler forms of propaganda and bias in the pro-NATO and pro-Atlantacist stance it took.

This account counters the commonly held assumption that Polygoon/Profilti, the company that produced the newsreels, blindly accepted and followed the government's points of view. It is true that both points of view often coincided and the government definitely influenced (and tried to influence) the newsreels through the creation of control and editorial committees, tipping the editorial committee, tipping or even pressuring the directors directly through the use of personal ties and by forcing van der Wiel and Landré defend Polygoon's position regarding communism in front of the BVC. However, Polygoon, as a commercial and independent company always had the final say in the production of the newsreels. It did not always accept government interference. Over the years the company matured and became increasingly independent. In no small part was this the result of Landré switching from his position as key player in government informing to that of head of Polygoon/Profilti.

Further Research

Historiographical research has always been an open and endless debate with continuously new positions and new insights. This research is no different. Over the course of my research I have found some lacunas in the historiography of the early cold war, informing in the Netherlands and newsreels/Polygoon which merit further investigation.

On the history of informing and the BVC we can see that Floribert Baudet has made a huge contribution to the body of knowledge that was first set up by Marja Wagenaar. Yet the scope of his work is limited to 1953 and mainly deals with the BVC and informing from a military perspective. Further research in this field could focus on the role of the high officials and the interpersonal ties with the private sectors, press and pillars. As I pointed out, personal networks seemed to be key elements in this period. Determining who knew who and in what capacity can prove to be very useful for any further research in this period.

This is especially true in the case of Joop Landré and Gijs van der Wiel. Both men were very influential characters in the field of informing and newsreels. In particular the person of Landré would warrant biographical research, as his own autobiography does not reveal much more than silly anecdotes from a very skewed point of view. Not only would research on Landré fill in gaps on informing in the years right after the war, a complete biography could also benefit media-history, as Landré was the founding father of one of the Netherlands' first de-pillarized networks: TROS.

On the side of newsreels, the entire company of Polygoon lacks a written history after 1945. The author of the company's biography before that date, Jitze de Haan, was working on a sequel when he died in 2003. As he was the owner of Polygoon's archive, which he had 'saved' from certain destruction in 1987, no-one has had the opportunity to research this material prior to this date and almost no one has seemed to know of the existence of this archive after this date. The archive is now stored away in the reclusion of the paper archives of the Dutch audiovisual archives in Hilversum. The fact that no history exists of a

major contributor of Dutch post-war history and definite shaper of the collective Dutch memory of that era is rather shameful.

Not only does Polygoon lack any proper historical research, this is even more the case of newsreels in the Netherlands in general. The works on newsreels in the Netherlands hardly even acknowledge the fact that there were other newsreels as well.

Finally, early cold war historiography on the Netherlands in general seems to lack any impetus. How the cold war affected the population has sporadically been researched, but a positioning of the Netherlands in a broader international context on many subjects that are outside of the reach of 'official' history seems to be a field of investigation that has been left largely untouched. Especially the fields of informing and anticommunism from an early cold war perspective have thus far only been investigated by Paul Koedijk and Floribert Baudet. With works on this period appearing only sporadically the period seems to have been neglected and deemed inferior to the exiting times of WWII and the sixties on which a myriad of books have been written. Hopefully new works, such as the collection of essays by Krabbedam, van Minnen and Scott-Smith will pull the fifties out of their historiographical rut, but as always, only time will tell.

Images



Image 1: Brand Dirk Ochse, 1945



Image 2: Joop Landré broadcasting as his alter ego 'The Fox', 1945



Image 3: Philip Bloemendal recording his voice-over whilst timing himself, 1957

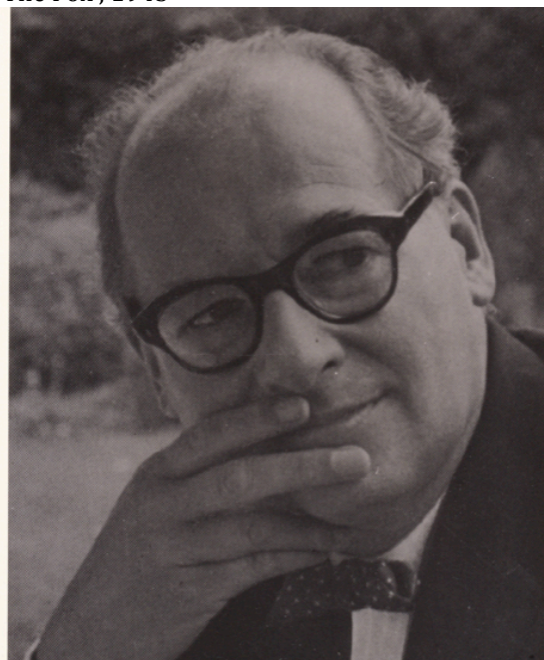


Image 4: Anton Koolhaas, [date unknown]



Image 5: Signing contracts with celebrities. From left to right; Kees Stip, Corrie Vonk, Kees Brusse, Wim Kan, Joop Landré and Cornelis Roem, 7 November 1957



Image 6: J.M. Lücker, 10 November 1962



Image 7: Gijs van der Wiel, 28 April 1967

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