
The work opens with an introduction discussing its thematic scope and structure. Then, we find information on the status of the research, including a description of the types of sources used and the search conducted. This is the first such significant book intended to comprehensively cover the issue of film distribution in the early communist period. Other works on the subject are fragmentary and overly subjective, such as Edward Zajiček’s monograph Polish Film Production. Problems of Profitability (Polska produkcja filmowa. Problemy rentowności) and Jerzy Toeplitz’s chapter Ways of Development of Cinematography (Drogi rozwoju kinematografii), included in History of Polish Film (Historia polskiego filmu) (vol. III). Among other noteworthy items are those by Tadeusz Lubelski and Konrad Zarębski, Małgorzata and Marek Hendrykowski, Zygmunt Chrzanowski.

The archival material used in Distribution... was extremely broad, and the sources were carefully described. The search was conducted mainly in the Archives of New Records and in the collections of the former Ministry of Information and Propaganda, the General Directorate of Polish Film, the Central Office of Cinematography (Centralny Urząd Kinematografii, CUK) and the Office of Cinematography. The few documents of the CUK – a testament to the authors’ efforts – were supplemented by others from the collections of the successor institutions of the Supreme Board of Cinematography and the Committee of Cinematography, established in 1987. Taking into account the field organizational structure (Provincial and District Boards of Cinemas), the authors conducted an in-depth search in the State Archives in Lublin, Łódź, Olsztyn, Wrocław,
Poznań and Rzeszów. In addition, an accompanying editorial note makes it possible to navigate precisely within the volume. The illustrations, bibliography and indexes are likewise carefully compiled.

The authors rightly noted that some decisions on cinematography were made by party organs (also informally); hence, the source material includes files from the collections of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN), Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) and Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR). On the other hand, documents from the Main Office of Press, Publication and Audience Control (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, GUKPPiW) and its subordinate censorship delegations require a separate study and will probably be included in a subsequent publication. Together with a discussion of production and technological issues, they could make up a comprehensive compendium of knowledge about cinematography in this period.

The work is divided into three parts, clearly distinguished from the vast area of research and corresponding to the three-stage system of functioning of cinematography in People’s Poland. Each consists of a thematic introduction, followed by the presentation of previously unpublished source documents: letters, agreements, regulations, circulars, orders and instructions (198 in all).

Part I System, Institutions, Management presents 47 source documents. The introduction, written by Jarosław Grzechowiak and titled Dissemination against the background of the cinematographic system of the first decade of the People’s Republic of Poland, is a discussion of the institutional framework of cinematography after World War II. The successive institutions responsible for film dissemination in Poland have been described. These were originally overseen by the Ministry of Information and Propaganda and the PPR’s Subcommittee on Film, from which the Film Sector Commission of the PZPR Central Committee¹ later emerged, reporting to the Department of Culture from 1949 and to the Department of Culture and Science of the PZPR Central Committee after 1955. The PPR Film Subcommittee dealt with production issues, deciding what films should be shot, giving opinions on finished films, and discussing scripts that could be sent for production. At a later stage, the key role was played by the Polish Film Company (Przedsiębiorstwo Film Polski)², established by the decree of the National Council Decree (Krajowa Rada Narodowa, KRN) of November 13, 1945. It was in charge of film production and distribution, managed cinemas, purchases and sales of films: this was a state holding company. The enterprise’s duties were defined by the decree on its establishment, which recognised film as a means of “information, social education and the dissemination of education and culture in society” (p. 130, document no. 18). Political oversight from the beginning of the People’s Republic of Poland was of vital importance to the authorities. In 1947, the Program Guidelines for Film Production, included in the reviewed volume, were created, which included the statement that Polish films “should be maintained in the style of socialist realism” (p. 680, document no. 137). Not surprisingly, the creation of a network of cinemas was underway: that is, the creation of a dense network of cinemas serving small towns and communities that previously

¹ The Film Sector Commission of the PZPR Central Committee included Leon Kruczkowski (chairman), Stanisław Albrecht (secretary), Włodzimierz Sokorski, Jerzy Borejsza and GUKPPiW director Tadeusz Zabłudowski.

² After the liquidation of the Ministry of Information and Propaganda in 1947, it was placed in the “task area” of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts. The Polish Film Company was headed by Aleksander Ford, who came from the T. Kościuszko Film Headquarters of the 1st Infantry Division of the Polish Army. Ford was replaced in 1947 by Eng. Stanisław Albrecht.
had no access to this form of entertainment. De facto, this process involved taking over pre-war cinemas from private owners.

The period in question closes with Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s paper at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, followed by a time of political and economic thaw. The functions of the head of the Central Office of Cinematography were assumed, moving from the Ministry of Railways, by Leonard Borkowicz, who decentralised and partially de-bureaucratised the system. From this period comes, for example, the note On shortcomings and deficiencies in filmmaking. In December 1956, a meeting was held to criticise previous governments in cinematography: “the past period did serious damage to our film life. The mistakes of the Stalinist period left a deep mark in cinematography as well” (p. 254, document no. 47).

This interesting introduction to Part I presents and describes a wealth of material showing facts and names related to the first (and not only) period of Polish cinema management. It perfectly shows how the authorities used film for political purposes, aiming to create a new society ideologically subordinated to Soviet influence.

Part II Cinemas: infrastructure and employees is a collection of documents and a discussion of the functioning of the network of state, community and traveling cinemas. The author of the introduction entitled Cinemas in People’s Poland in 1944-1956, which precedes documents numbered 48-124, is Krzysztof Jojko, who set himself the task of showing the picture of cinematography from the side of cinema infrastructure. Cinemas were the only place where audiences had contact with the film repertoire. Pre-war cinemas could hardly provide access to film. There was a shortage of new cinema facilities, and this gap was tried to be filled by traveling cinemas. Management followed the top and down model, which was used in many countries, but, under the conditions of People’s Poland, the management of cinematography was in practice a monopoly and was heavily centralised. The system of state directive-imposed economy facilitated the introduction of propaganda messages with an ideological background that intensified over the years. The model in question was the result of the modeling of Soviet cinematography, with the simultaneous affirmation of Soviet films in the repertory.

The State National Council’s decree on the establishment of the Polish Film Company, as mentioned, created a de facto state monopoly, although the Economic Commission of the Council of Ministers pointed to the benefits of involving private cinema entrepreneurs. Paradoxically, however, the legislature took away the ability of those who had operated cinemas before the war: according to the decree, the Ministry of Information and Propaganda could grant permission to operate cinemas to other than state-owned entities, but only to local government or community-owned ones. By various means, private owners were expropriated.

Under such legal conditions and in the face of equipment and premises shortages, it was decided to develop mobile, traveling cinemas. As with the expansion of the cinema network, they also functioned before the war; only the scale of needs and administratively subordinate areas were different. During the People’s Republic of Poland, mobile cinemas were subordinated to the Department of Touring Cinemas (and, in time, to the Cinema Boards in the field), which required the managers of the cinema-bus groups – in addition to showing films – to give propaganda “talks.” Not surprisingly, audiences were often hostile to such “detours” – they expected Polish repertoire and good entertainment, but got Soviet films.

At the same time, the seizure of cinema equipment from the recovered lands was underway. However, the equipment, generally of good quality, often fell victim to looters or was vandalised; where possible, modernisation was carried out. Consequently, by the end of 1949, only 580 facilities were in operation. By the end of 1955, however, 1,878 cinemas were already in operation, which was presented as a success that was one of the results of the Six-Year Plan.
The cinema infrastructure required qualified personnel. For the most part, especially immediately after the war, it consisted of employees who had gained qualifications and experience during the interwar period. Cinema operators familiar with cinema equipment were especially in demand. Personnel needs were high due to the opening of post-German facilities in the recovered lands. Courses lasting about 200 hours were organised, and the candidates’ political past and party affiliation were scrutinized in detail. Indeed, the purpose of recruiting new employees was also to replace the old staff with new ones. Polish Film Company relied on trusted employees to take part in the implementation of the state’s cultural policy and indoctrination of society. This part of the book contains many documents showing how human resources were managed, and figures are also given, through which, for example, we learn that the employees of the ideological front, which included touring cinemas, were, for the time, well paid.

Part III was titled Films, Repertoire, Audiences. The author of the introduction (Cinematic Repertoire and Film Audiences in Poland 1944-1956), which precedes documents numbered 125-198, is Konrad Klejsa. He recalls early on the tasks that were set for the cinema authorities after 1945. Cinema was to become an agent of influence on wider social masses than before the war. The road to achieving this goal was to be led by changing the repertoire – in accordance with the ideological directions of the state’s cultural policy. In 1947, it was decided that the films required would first be presented to the Political Bureau of the PPR Central Committee. In turn, in the late 1940s, a repertory policy was established, centrally controlled by the Cultural Department of the PZPR Central Committee. Not surprisingly, as a consequence, films from the USSR and the people’s democracy countries were mainly screened. As the critics wrote, Soviet films are “profoundly humanistic” and do not, like those of the West, present imperialist values (which were shunned). The political leadership of cinematography focused on messages enabling the upbringing of the “new man.” According to the Central Planning Office, in 1948, screens were shown nationwide:

- 26 Polish films (including 21 pre-war films; it is worth noting that Polish films from this period, such as Forbidden Songs and Treasure, were box office hits),
- 127 Soviet,
- 55 American,
- 32 English and French each,
- 10 Swedish,
- 2 Italian and Swiss each

As you can see, the number of Soviet films exceeds all the other films combined.

The person who led the radical reduction in the number of Western films screened was Stanislaw Albrecht, director of the Polish Film Company. He obediently carried out the directives of the Central Committee’s Politburo, according to which it was necessary to “strive to expel harmful Anglo-American films and others that infiltrate foreign ideology” (p. 154, document no. 23).

In such a situation, one of the forms of promoting cinematic images were regularly organized Soviet Film Days or reviews of works from other countries of people’s democracy, such as the Chinese Film Festival. There were also, of course, similar screenings of domestic cinematography, such as Days and Reviews of Polish Films, held between 1953 and 1955. Special screenings were also regularly held on the occasion of national holidays, May 1 and July 22.

As a consequence of one-sided programming, there was a repertoire crisis, and cinema managers and their field principals had significant problems filling theaters and executing schedules. Repertoire monotony reigned; for example, only one American film was released in 1951-1953, and only three the following year. Interestingly, even the works of Charlie Chaplin, who, after all, played positive characters derived from the “oppressed people,” were unavailable;
despite this, *The Gold Rush* and even the famous *Dictator* were not shown. Aleksander Ford explained this situation by the lack of foreign currency for shopping. The public looked forward to Polish films in particular, but only three domestic productions were released in 1953. Particularly conspicuous was the lack of Polish children’s films; Saturday and Sunday mornings mainly screened pictures from Czechoslovakia and the USSR.

The Main Office of Press, Publication and Audience Control, which was subordinate to the Prime Minister, was responsible for authorizing films from July 5, 1946. All films had to receive a placard from the censors, who checked them especially for international politics and religion, especially the role of the Catholic Church. The words “inappropriate content” were adopted as a universal explanation for the lack of permission for distribution.

At the end of 1954, seven French and two Italian films were “rehabilitated.” The thaw made it possible to verify earlier bans and decisions. At the same time, clubs of cinema lovers, generally affiliated with community centers or universities and founded by students, became active. The first Film Discussion Club (Dyskusyjny Klub Filmowy, DKF) was founded on October 6, 1955, based on the idea of French ciné-clubs and was associated with the environment of the weekly “Po prostu”. This can be considered to be “the light at the end of the tunnel”, but it was not until the creation, thanks to Jerzy Toeplitz, of the Federation of DKFs, that the scale of the social need for contact with a different film repertoire became obvious. A thaw came, also in Polish cinema, manifested by the Polish film school, which successfully sought inspiration in Italian neorealism and the French new wave. In 1955, Film Teams (including Kadr) were established, which produced pictures by Kawalerowicz, Wajda, Kutz, Munk and others. This part of the reviewed study includes a discussion of invaluable documents, showing how the film repertoire was created at the time and what pressures cinema employees were subjected to in trying to make it interesting for viewers.

The authors, as mentioned, do not deal with censorship, technology and production as thoroughly as the issues shown in the three parts discussed earlier. When supplemented with these three thematic blocks, the publication could be a comprehensive compendium of knowledge about Polish cinematography in 1944-1956.

Within the time period of between 1944 and 1956, the authors have distinguished four periods in the early history of People’s Poland:
− PKWN period, the end of the war and the development of the recovered lands,
− the period of the coalition government until the 1946 referendum,
− the Stalinist period,
− a period of brief thaw until 1956, which resulted in the abolition of the Central Office of Cinematography and the introduction of the Supreme Board of Cinematography, and a gradual change in the model in the following years.

The documents collected in the volume, although they show the dynamics of change in the adopted period, have been subordinated to the thematic criterion, making up content-coherent chapters. As a result, the work has a clear character, in terms of construction and scientific editing. It is worth recommending to all researchers of the years 1944-1956 in Polish cinematography.

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3 The author of this term is Professor Aleksander Jackiewicz.