DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER HENRI STORCK AND THE LONG SHADOW OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

- Roel Vande Winkel -

In the last decades of his life, Henri Storck (1907-1999), celebrated as a founding father of Belgian documentary cinema and as a critical left-wing filmmaker, received two honorary doctorates. These laudations disturbed filmmaker André Cauvin (1907-2004), who reproached Storck for making films and playing a role in the Film Guild in German-occupied Belgium (1940-1944).[1] In 2006, when both directors had already passed away, Cauvin's accusations against Storck were revived by the Belgian press. The controversy was significant enough for the French Community to finance a research project on Storck's wartime activities. A research report, written by Bruno Benvindo, was finalised in 2008 and published in 2010.[2] This article offers some significant additions to Benvindo's book and proposes additional avenues for research.

To make films in German-occupied Belgium, directors were challenged on various fronts. They had to find funding and have their film activities approved by the German propaganda services (*Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien,* hereafter PAB) and the Belgian organisations designated by the PAB, in particular by the Syndicate Chamber of Film Distributors and its president, Jan Vanderheyden.[3] This article examines how Henri Storck, as head of the company *Cinéma - Édition - Production* (CEP), dealt with these challenges. This article does not venture into terra incognita but expands on Benvindo's findings. Specifically, this article sheds new light on: (1) Henri Storck's interactions with various branches of the German film production company Tobis Filmkunst GmbH; (2) Storck's efforts to appease the PAB and Jan Vanderheyden; (3) The functioning of the Syndicate Chamber and its successor, the Film Guild, as well as the roles Storck played in those organisations and the advantages he did or did not derive from it; (4) The ways in which Storck distanced himself from the PAB and Vanderheyden after the liberation; (5) The course and outcome of the various investigations to which Storck was subjected in 1944-1945, the narrative he developed for his defence and the reservations that can be expressed about that line of defence.

I. The Institutional Framework

In occupied Belgium, in consultation with the German Propaganda Ministry, the PAB was responsible for regulating the film industry. In the context of this article, the PAB's policy on Belgian film production is particularly relevant. Or rather, the lack of such policy. The occupying forces saw Belgium first and foremost as an export market. The PAB focused on regulating the professions it needed to control the Belgian market. These were film exhibitors (cinemas) and film distributors. The PAB had no interest in stimulating Belgian productions. Only a handful of Belgian feature films were produced during the occupation. There was slightly more room for short films, since all film programmes were required to consist of three parts: a feature film, the (German-controlled) newsreel, and a short production. The latter could be fiction but was often some form of documentary. At the time, the German term *Kulturfilm* (*cultuurfilm* in Dutch, *film culturel* in French) was commonly used for this part of the programme.

The foundation for the PAB's film policy was laid with the 'First Regulation on the New Organisation of the Film Industry in Belgium, of 6 August 1940'. Anyone who wanted to be active in the Belgian film world was obliged to be a member of either the existing association of film distributors in Belgium or the existing association of cinema owners in Belgium.[4] This vague description allowed the PAB to determine which organisation was considered the "existing" association. For film distributors, this became the Syndicate Chamber. Everyone had to (re)apply for membership and each application had to be approved by the PAB. This way, the PAB could put persons or companies out of business just by denying their membership application. Members were obliged to follow directions from the Syndicate Chamber, thereby allowing the PAB to use the Syndicate Chamber to impose hundreds of rules on film distributors. The same system was applied to cinema owners, through a different organisation, but that story is less relevant to this article.

1. *Filmgilde* (Dutch) or *Gilde du Film* (French).
2. Bruno benvindo, *Henri Storck, le cinéma belge et l'occupation,* Bruxelles, 2010. Benvindo consulted Storck's archives at the Fondation Henri Storck. In the meantime, they have been deposited at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (BE AULB Z 059) and will be referred to as ULB-Archives Storck Henri (hereafter ULB-ASH). When I consulted and partially photographed the archives in early 2021, ULB-ASH still used the file numbers employed by Benvindo. These reference numbers are therefore cited throughout this article. Since then, the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) has reassigned new reference numbers to part of the collection, unfortunately without providing cross-references to the previous numbering system. For the new numbering, see Cecile Peltier, *BE AULB Z 059, Archives de Storck, Henri,* Bruxelles, 2021.
3. *Belgische Syndicale Kamer van Filmverhuurders* (Dutch) or *Chambre Syndicale Belge des Distributeurs de Films* (French).
4. *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs,* 7 August 1940, 148.

It is significant that the regulation of 6 August 1940 did not mention directors, cameramen or production companies. The occupying forces had no interest in these. This also became clear when the PAB forced the Syndicate Chamber to adapt its structure. In March 1940, shortly before the German invasion, the Syndicate Chamber had set up a department for film producers, chaired by Charles Dekeukeleire (president), with Jan Vanderheyden as vice-president and Henri Storck as secretary. In the summer of 1940, the PAB forced the Syndicate Chamber to abolish that department and become exclusively an association of distributors. Producers were excluded, unless they also distributed films. This was the case, among others, for Jan Vanderheyden, who distributed both his own films and other productions. Jan Vanderheyden was also appointed chairman of the Syndicate Chamber in 1940. He would hold a leading position in the Belgian film sector until the end of the occupation. His autonomy was limited: his main task was to implement and execute German policy, which he did without protest and often even with enthusiasm. He nevertheless made as much use as possible of the powers he had.[5]

At the end of 1940 and beginning of 1941, Jan Vanderheyden did something that he would rarely or never repeat in the following years: he followed his own agenda and went against the wishes of the PAB. He created, within the Syndicate Chamber, a production group. As its self-appointed leader, he was assisted by three people, each representing a sub-department. Gaston Schoukens represented the film producers.[6] Joseph Lebrun and Auguste Meuter represented technicians and laboratories respectively. The PAB admitted that creating this group was not its initiative but added that allowing it also enabled them to keep an eye on local filmmakers.[7] In consultation with the PAB, the Syndicate Chamber (often Vanderheyden himself) henceforth monitored every attempt to make a local film.[8] Film proposals were to be submitted by accredited producers for needed approval from the PAB via the Syndicate Chamber. Producers also had to show proof of financial backing for their project. There is no indication that film productions had to be 'New Order' oriented, but it was logical that the films should not go against it either. The finished film was then examined by the German censorship office *(Filmprüfstelle)*.

Films carried not only ideological and cultural values, which explains why the PAB was so interested in cinema, but they were also economic commodities. Victor Leemans, Secretary-General for Economic Affairs in occupied Belgium, decreed the establishment of 'industrial combines' in February 1941.[9] Industrial combines were bodies that united and led, through compulsory membership, all companies and persons involved in a particular economic sector. The combines could draft their own regulations, but it was the Secretary-General who converted the drafts into decisions and enacted them.[10] This dirigiste model already existed in the Belgian film sector, with the crucial difference that it was the PAB that took control, and not the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Leemans would try to change this, encouraged by filmmakers such as Charles Dekeukeleire and Henri Storck, who hoped to reduce German influence on Belgian cinema.[11] In February 1941, Leemans commissioned a solicitor to gather information in preparation of the installment of what was then called a national film chamber.[12] It would

5. Roel Vande Winkel, "Jan Vanderheyden and Edith Kiel: 'Leading' the Belgian Film Sector While Taking Orders from the German Propaganda Service", in Pavel Skopal & Roel Vande Winkel, (eds), *Film Professionals in Nazi-Occupied Europe,* Cham, 2021, 87-117.
6. *CINEMA,* 15 January 1941, 1 and 20. This occupier-controlled trade journal (1940-1944) always wrote its title in capital letters, so as not to have to choose between *cinema* (Dutch) or *cinéma* (French).
7. CegeSoma, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (August 1941),* 71.
8. See Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck* and Roel Vande Winkel, "Vlaanderen te weer? Het verzwegen parcours van Flandria Film in de Tweede Wereldoorlog", *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen,* 78/3, 210-235.
9. *Bedrijfsgroeperingen* (Dutch) or *Groupements d'entreprises* (French).
10. Nico Wouters, *De Führerstaat. Overheid en collaboratie in België (1940-1944),* Tielt, 2006, 77-78.
11. *Ciné-Presse,* 31 May 1949, 1. *Ciné-Presse,* 21 June 1949, 1.
12. *CINEMA,* 1 March 1941, 1. Letter from Edward Claesen to Victor Leemans, 7 May 1941 (KADOC, Victor Leemans archive, BE/942855/418, folder 84).

take almost two and a half years before this resulted in the establishment of the Belgian Film Guild by the Ministry of Economic Affairs on 18 July 1943.[13] The PAB and Vanderheyden had closely monitored the drafting of its statutes and all related documents.[14] The Film Guild, which replaced the Syndicate Chamber and the association of cinema owners, was tasked by the Ministry with overseeing the self-governance of the film industry in professional, cultural, and economic matters.

The Film Guild was headed by a leader (Jan Vanderheyden) and a director. The latter was Frans Dupont, who had been appointed by Victor Leemans in consultation with the Flemish-nationalist collaborationist party Flemish National League (VNV) of which Leemans was also a member.[15] The Film Guild consisted of three groups, responsible for film distribution, film exhibition, and film production respectively. The production group, also led by Jan Vanderheyden, had approximately 100 members: people working for production companies, studios, and laboratories.[16] The intermediate level between these members and the group leader was formed by an additional professional council.[17] This council had three members. Two of them, technician Joseph Lebrun and director Gaston Schoukens, had previously also represented their colleagues in the Syndicate Chamber. Number three was Henri Storck, who, for the first time since the occupation, became more than just a member of a film corporate organisation. Storck also took on an additional role within the Film Production group, as deputy leader to Vanderheyden.[18]

Although the establishment of the Film Guild had been developing for a long time, the Ministry of Economic Affairs soon lost its enthusiasm. Within the statutes, ministry staff had mistakenly assigned a cultural task to the Film Guild. This was a problem, as the Ministry of Economic Affairs was not competent for cultural matters. However, Vanderheyden and the Film Guild found this cultural mission essential and refused to amend the statutes. This issue was debated until the end of the occupation.[19] Meanwhile, Leemans and his staff also realised that the Film Guild, apart from collecting membership fees, did not generate its own income. Leemans therefore decided in the spring of 1944, when the organisation was less than a year old, to abolish the Film Guild. He had a decree drawn up, to come into effect on 1 April 1944. However, the document was neither signed nor published and therefore remained a dead letter.[20] In post-war trials against the leaders of the Film Guild, who were put on trial for collaboration, no reference was made to these conflicts, not even by Leemans himself.

In 1943-1944, Vanderheyden was able to implement something new. A 'Committee for the Encouragement of National Short Film Production' was set up.[21] Prepared within the Syndicate Chamber but realised within the Film Guild, this implemented a support system for producers such as Vanderheyden himself. New short films, to be submitted to this committee, could receive a distinction.[22] Film distributors had to acquire at least one Belgian short that received such a distinction and had to pair it with a new, unreleased feature film.

13. *Moniteur Belge,* 24 July 1943.
14. Letter from the Film Guild (Vanderheyden) to the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Byvoet), 10 December 1943 (State Archives of Belgium, Min. Economie, Direction de l'organisation professionel [hereafter SAB-ME], 605). Procès-verbal de l'audience publique, 24 May 1949 (State Archives, La Gilde du Film, Auditorat Militaire près le Conseil de guerre permanent de la province de Brabant [hereafter SAB-GF]).
15. *Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond.* See Confidential letter to Victor Leemans from Albert de Poortere (VNV Leiding Kultuur), 21 January 1943 (CegeSoma, AA 156/39).
16. *CINEMA,* 1 August 1943, 7. *CINEMA,* 15 November 1943, 7-9.
17. *Raad van de bedrijfsgroepeering filmproductie* (Dutch) or *Conseil du groupement professionel Production du Film* (French). *CINEMA,* 1 December 1943, 2.
18. Storck's official title was *leider-plaatsvervanger* (Dutch) or *chef-suppléant* (French). *CINEMA,* 1 October 1943, 6.
19. See correspondence in SAB-ME, 605. Letter from the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Leemans) to the Film Guild (Vanderheyden), 17 July 1944 (ADVN, Walter Opsomer Archive, 92/316).
20. Arrête portant dissolution de la Gilde du Film, unsigned draft to take effect on 1 April 1944 (SAB-ME, 605).
21. *Commissie tot aanmoediging van de nationale bijfilmproductie* (Dutch) or *Commission pour l'encouragement aux films nationaux de court-métrage* (French).
22. *Waardepredikaat* (Dutch) or *Certificat de valeur* (French), based on the German concept of *Prädikat.*

Distributors were also obliged to give an extra 2 % of the income they earned from this programme to the producers. All of this was to help new Belgian short films find an audience and bring in money for their producers. This was the first time in Belgian film history that an (indirect) support measure for national productions had been created. At least, for films that did receive a distinction.

There were no established criteria for distinguishing whether or not a film was valuable. The decision was fully in the hands of committee members. In addition to chairman Robert Van Roosbroeck (member of the collaborationist *DeVlag* and the *Algemeene SS-Vlaanderen*) and secretary Carl Vincent (editor of the Film Guild's *CINEMA* journal), there were three members of the Film Guild (including Jan Vanderheyden) and three external members (including writer Ernest Claes and VNV member and Brussels alderman for Fine Arts Maurits Liesenborghs).[23] The committee therefore consisted mainly of Flemish men, including representatives of the collaborationist parties DeVlag and VNV. The committee remained active until the end of the occupation.

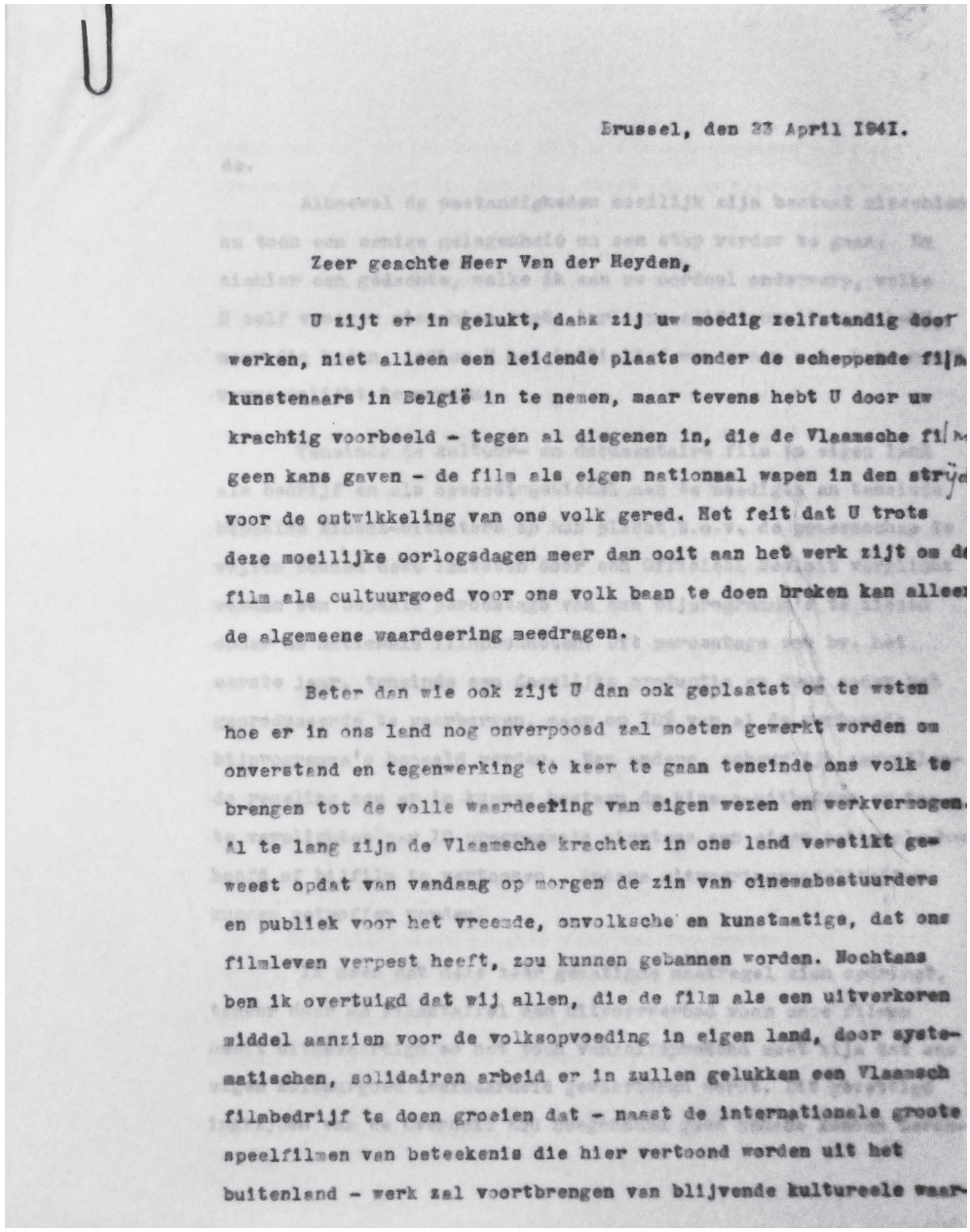
II. Henri Storck and the Syndicate Chamber

At the beginning of the occupation, Henri Storck was allowed to join the Syndicate Chamber. Throughout the occupation he did his utmost to be on good terms with its chairman, Jan Vanderheyden. In April 1941, when Vanderheyden celebrated the 25th anniversary of his professional activities, Storck sent him congratulations and flowers.[24] Later that month, he wrote Vanderheyden a long letter, asking to formally oblige exhibitors to show a minimum number of Belgian films. In this letter, Storck flattered Vanderheyden extensively. Storck, born in Flanders and bilingual, played on the Flemish-friendly policy of the occupying forces *(Flamenpolitik)* as well as on Vanderheyden's Flemish sentiments.

Storck eagerly presented himself as an outspoken Flemish filmmaker, which contrasted with his behaviour before and after the occupation. Storck's 1941 letter to Vanderheyden is full of superlatives, praising Vanderheyden for his "courageous independent work", "leading position", "powerful example", and so on. Storck continued:

> Better than anyone else, you are therefore in a position to understand how, in our country, tireless work will still be required to combat ignorance and obstruction, in order to lead our people toward a full appreciation of their own nature and productive power. For far too long, Flemish forces in our land have been stifled for it to be possible, from one day to the next, to make disappear the inclination of cinema managers and audiences toward the foreign, the unnational and the artificial, which has corrupted our film culture. Nevertheless, I am convinced that all of us who regard film as a chosen instrument for the education of the people in their own country will, through systematic and united labour, succeed in fostering the growth of a Flemish film industry that - alongside the major international feature films of significance shown here from abroad - will produce works of lasting cultural value.[25]

23. DeVlag stood for *Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* or German-Flemish Working Community. *Algemeene SS-Vlaanderen* or *Germaansche SS in Vlaanderen* was the Flemish branch of the Germanic SS.
24. Letter from Jan Vanderheyden to Henri Storck, 16 April 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 6).
25. "Beter dan wie ook, zijt U dan ook geplaatst om te weten hoe er in ons land nog onverpoosd zal moeten gewerkt worden om onverstand en tegenwerking te keer te gaan ten einde ons volk te brengen tot de volle waardering van eigen wezen en werkvermogen. Al te lang zijn de Vlaamse krachten in ons land verstikt geweest op dat van vandaag op morgen de zin van cinemabestuurders en publiek voor het vreemde, onvolksche en kunstmatige, dat ons filmleven verpest heeft, zou kunnen gebannen worden. Nochtans ben ik overtuigd dat wij allen, die de film als een uitverkoren middel aanzien voor de volksopvoeding in eigen land, door systematischen solidairen arbeid er in zullen gelukken een Vlaamsch filmbedrijf te doen groeien dat - naast de internationale groote speelfilmen van beteekenis die hier vertoond worden uit het buitenland - werk zal voorbrengen van blijvende culturele waarde." Letter from Storck to Vanderheyden, 23 April 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 4). This is not cited by Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*.



U

Brussel, den 23 April 1941.

Zeer geachte Heer Van der Heyden,

U zijt er in gelukt, dank zij uw moedig zelfstandig door werken, niet alleen een leidende plaats onder de scheppende filmkunstenaars in België in te nemen, maar tevens hebt U door uw krachtig voorbeeld - tegen al diegenen in, die de Vlaamsche film geen kans gaven - de film als eigen nationaal wapen in den strijd voor de ontwikkeling van ons volk gered. Het feit dat U trots deze moeilijke oorlogsdagen meer dan ooit aan het werk zijt om de film als cultuurgoed voor ons volk baan te doen breken kan alleen de algemeene waardeering meedragen.

Beter dan wie ook zijt U dan ook geplaatst om te weten hoe er in ons land nog onverpoosd zal moeten gewerkt worden om onverstand en tegenwerking te keer te gaan teneinde ons volk te brengen tot de volle waardeering van eigen wezen en verkrachtigen. Al te lang zijn de Vlaamsche krachten in ons land verstikt geweest opdat van vandaag op morgen de zin van cinemabestuurders en publiek voor het vreemde, onvolksche en kunstmatige, dat ons filmleven verpest heeft, zou kunnen gebannen worden. Hoehtans ben ik overtuigd dat wij allen, die de film als een uitverkoren middel aanzien voor de volksopvoeding in eigen land, door systematischen, solidairen arbeid er in zullen gelukken een Vlaamsch filmbedrijf te doen groeien dat - naast de internationale groote speelfilmen van beteekenis die hier vertoond worden uit het buitenland - werk zal voortbrengen van blijvende kultureele waar-

Letter from Henri Storck to Jan Vanderheyden, 23 April 1941. Source : Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse de l'ULB, fonds Henri Storck, BE AULB Z 059, Z59-241.2, folder 4.

In the midsts of this flattery, in early May 1941, Henri Storck and his colleague Charles Dekeukeleire received bad news. The PAB obliged the Syndicate Chamber to expel them both as members.[26] The decision was based on "their Belgicist activities" and on information provided by the Security Service'.[27] It is not clear what information the *Sicherheitsdienst* provided nor is it clear what the alleged 'Belgicist activities' of both directors were. Whatever the reason, the PAB had made its decision, and the Syndicate Chamber had to ratify it. The letter excluding Storck and Dekeukeleire from the Syndicate Chamber, was signed by Jan Vanderheyden (chairman) and Gaston Schoukens (representative of the producers).[28] The latter immediately apologised privately for this and said that he felt compelled to sign the letter after "a violent discussion" with Vanderheyden.[29] Both Dekeukeleire and Storck defended themselves, among other things by emphasising their Flemish ancestry and by protesting with Victor Leemans.[30] Storck's archives contain a remarkable document from that period, in which he defended himself against any objections that may have been raised against him. The status of the document is unclear; it is a note that he must have written in preparation for a letter or for discussions. In this document Storck declared that he was not Jewish and had never worked with Jews or Freemasons. He also denied having been the director of *New Belgium* (1938), a political propaganda film for Paul Van Zeeland, who was campaigning against Léon Degrelle.[31] Storck described himself rather as a technician who had deliberately refused to have his name appear in the credits of that commissioned film. He also minimised his contribution to the film *Borinage* (1934).[32] Storck described himself as a mere cameraman who had been honoured to work with Joris Ivens and distanced himself from the film's political, communist tendencies.[33] Storck was under considerable financial pressure when he wrote this document, but it remains remarkable to see him distance himself so much from films that are considered key works in his oeuvre. In November 1941, when the Syndicate Chamber tried to locate a print of *Borinage*, Storck, saying he did not have one, distanced himself again from the film.[34]

26. Letter from the PAB (Gerhardus) to the Syndicate Chamber, 5 May 1941 (SAB-GF).

27. 'Die Kurzfilmhersteller Storck & De Keukeleire [sic!] wurden auf Grund ihrer belgizistischen Betätigung und auf Grund von Auskünften des SD von weiterer Betätigung auf dem Produktionsgebiet ausgeschlossen.' Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien - Propagandalage- und Tätigkeitsbericht vom 15.- 31. Mai 1941, 5 (CegeSoma, GRMA, T-77, Microfilm 982).

28. File "Expulsion Chambre Syndicale" (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 4).

29. "Ce matin encore à la Chambre Syndicale, il y a eu une violente discussion avec notre président concernant cette affaire. Finalement, on m'a mis sous les yeux une lettre de la Propaganda-Abteilung qui demande à la Chambre Syndicale de te communiquer immédiatement cette décision." Letter from Schoukens to Storck, 13 May 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 4).

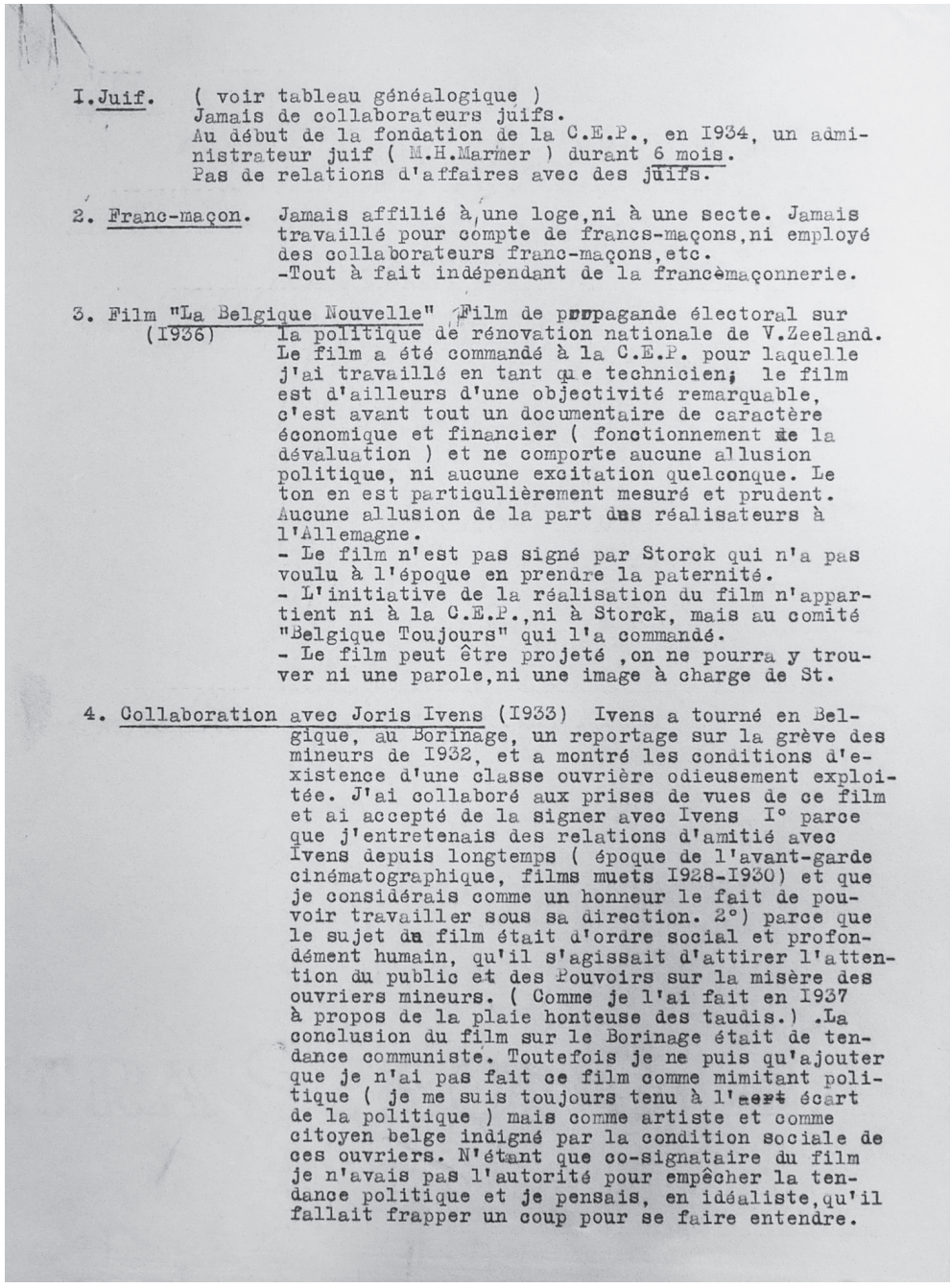
30. Report on the Storck & De Keukeleire case; draft letter from Storck to Leemans, May 1941; letter from Storck to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, 21 June 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 4). Letter from Storck to Claesen (with draft letter to Leemans and draft report), 19 May 1941 ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, file 7).

31. *La Belgique nouvelle* (French) or *Nieuw België* (Dutch).

32. *Misère au Borinage* (French) and *Ellende in de Borinage* (Dutch).

33. "Jamais de collaborateurs juifs. Au début de la fondation de la C.E.P., en 1934, un administrateur juif (M.H. Marmer) durant 6 mois. Pas de relation d'affaires avec des Juifs […] Jamais affilié à une loge, ni à une secte. Jamais travaillé pour le compte de francs-maçons, ni employé des collaborateurs franc-macons etc. Tout à fait indépendant de la franc-maçonnerie. Film "La Belgique nouvelle" (1936). Film de propagande électoral sur la politique de rénovation nationale de V.Zeeland. Le film a été commandé à la C.E.P. pour laquelle j'ai travaillé en tant que technicien; le film est d'ailleurs d'une objectivité remarquable […] Aucune allusion de la part des réalisateurs à l'Allemagne. Le film n'est pas signé par Storck qui n'a pas voulu à l'époque en prendre la paternité […] La conclusion du film sur le Borinage était de tendance communiste. Toutefois je ne puis qu'ajouter que je n'ai pas fait ce film comme militant politique (je me suis toujours tenu à l'écart de la politique) mais comme artiste et comme citoyen belge indigné par la condition sociale de ces ouvriers. N'étant que co-signataire du film je n'avais pas l'autorité pour empêcher la tendance politique et je pensais, en idéaliste, qu'il fallait frapper un coup pour se faire entendre." Document beginning with the word Juif (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 7). This is not cited by Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*.

34. "En effet, je n'ai jamais été en possession de copies de ce film […] Je tiens à bien mettre au point que la conclusion politique qui figure dans ce film n'est pas de moi; j'ai été seulement engagé, au même titre que les autres techniciens, comme assistant artistique de M.J. Ivens. Pour ma part, je me suis toujours abstenu d'introduire des questions politiques dans mon oeuvre personelle." Letter from Storck to Chambre Syndicale des Distributeurs de films, 3 November 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 2).



1. Juif. (voir tableau généalogique)
Jamais de collaborateurs juifs.
Au début de la fondation de la C.E.P., en 1934, un administrateur juif (M.H.Marmer) durant 6 mois.
Pas de relations d'affaires avec des juifs.

2. Franc-maçon. Jamais affilié à une loge, ni à une secte. Jamais travaillé pour compte de francs-maçons, ni employé des collaborateurs franc-maçons, etc.
-Tout à fait indépendant de la francmaçonnerie.

3. Film "La Belgique Nouvelle" (1936) Film de propagande électoral sur la politique de rénovation nationale de V.Zeeland. Le film a été commandé à la C.E.P. pour laquelle j'ai travaillé en tant que technicien; le film est d'ailleurs d'une objectivité remarquable, c'est avant tout un documentaire de caractère économique et financier (fonctionnement de la dévaluation) et ne comporte aucune allusion politique, ni aucune excitation quelconque. Le ton en est particulièrement mesuré et prudent. Aucune allusion de la part des réalisateurs à l'Allemagne.
- Le film n'est pas signé par Storck qui n'a pas voulu à l'époque en prendre la paternité.
- L'initiative de la réalisation du film n'appartient ni à la C.E.P., ni à Storck, mais au comité "Belgique Toujours" qui l'a commandé.
- Le film peut être projeté, on ne pourra y trouver ni une parole, ni une image à charge de St.

4. Collaboration avec Joris Ivens (1933) Ivens a tourné en Belgique, au Borinage, un reportage sur la grève des mineurs de 1932, et a montré les conditions d'existence d'une classe ouvrière odieusement exploitée. J'ai collaboré aux prises de vues de ce film et ai accepté de la signer avec Ivens 1° parce que j'entretenais des relations d'amitié avec Ivens depuis longtemps (époque de l'avant-garde cinématographique, films muets 1928-1930) et que je considérais comme un honneur le fait de pouvoir travailler sous sa direction. 2°) parce que le sujet du film était d'ordre social et profondément humain, qu'il s'agissait d'attirer l'attention du public et des Pouvoirs sur la misère des ouvriers mineurs. (Comme je l'ai fait en 1937 à propos de la plaie honteuse des taudis.) .La conclusion du film sur le Borinage était de tendance communiste. Toutefois je ne puis qu'ajouter que je n'ai pas fait ce film comme mimitant politique (je me suis toujours tenu à l'écart de la politique) mais comme artiste et comme citoyen belge indigné par la condition sociale de ces ouvriers. N'étant que co-signataire du film je n'avais pas l'autorité pour empêcher la tendance politique et je pensais, en idéaliste, qu'il fallait frapper un coup pour se faire entendre.

In this undated document (probably from 1941), Henri Storck minimizes his contribution to Borinage (1934). Source : Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse de l'ULB, fonds Henri Storck, BE AULB Z 059, Z59-241.3, folder 7.

Bruxelles,le 3 novembre I94I
34 Rue de l'Ecuyer.

CHAMBRE SYNDICALE BELGE DES DISTRIBU6
TEURS DE FILMS
98 Boulevard A.Max,
Bruxelles.

Monsieur le Secrétaire-Général,

En réponse à votre lettre du 3I octobre me demandant une copie du film "MISERE AU BORINAGE", je regrette de devoir vous informer que je me trouve dans l'impossibilité de satisfaire à cette demande.

En effet, je n'ai jamais été en possession de copies de ce film, ni de son négatif, étant donné que je ne suis ni propriétaire, ni co-propriétaire, ni producteur de ce film.

Je ne crois pas qu'il existe encore une copie de ce film en Belgique ; en dehors des projections privées qui ont eu lieu immédiatement après sa réalisation en I933, je n'ai plus eu connaissance d'une projection de ce film, qui d'ailleurs n'était pas sonore.

Je tiens à bien mettre au point que la conclusion politique qui figure dans ce film n'est pas de moi ; j'ai été engagé, au même titre que les autres techniciens , comme assistant artistique de M.J.Ivens. Pour ma part, je me suis toujours abstenu d'introduire des questions politiques dans mon oeuvre personnelle.

Je vous prie d'agréer,Monsieur le Secrétaire-Général, l'assurance de ma considération la plus distinguée.

Also in this letter of 3 November 1941 to the Secretary-General of the Syndicate Chamber (Robert Vanden Neste, one of Vanderheyden's closest collaborators), Storck minimizes his contribution to Borinage. Source: Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse de l'ULB, fonds Henri Storck, BE AULB Z 059, Z59-241.3, folder 2).

Just as the reasons for Dekeuleire and Storck's expulsion from the Syndicate Chamber remain unclear, so too does the rationale behind their swift readmission.[35] They may have received help from Vanderheyden, who offered to accompany them to a meeting with the PAB.[36] By the end of August 1941, Dekeukeleire and Storck were back at work, and each was involved in specific film projects, for which they received the green light from the PAB.[37] At the same time, they had to submit additional documents in support of their membership and to prove that they were of Aryan descent. Storck apparently had trouble doing so. In August 1941, he had to submit additional information about his grandmother. He added: "I hope that the suspicions that existed regarding my ancestry and suggested that I have Jewish blood in my veins will thus disappear completely."[38] The evidence may have been insufficient, because Storck would not definitively regain his membership until February 1942.[39] After the war, Storck would claim that he had been banned from professional activities continuously from May 1941 to August 1942.[40] This lie, implying that he had been completely inactive until August 1942, allowed him to remain silent about the film projects that he developed, or at least attempted to develop, before filming *Peasant Symphony* (1942-1944).[41]

III. Henri Storck in Search of Film Projects

In 1940 and 1941, Henri Storck developed a variety of film plans on a wide range of subjects. Storck's production company CEP was in financial trouble at the time, and he was desperate to find work.[42] In December 1940, he attempted to sell film projects to the Brussels branch of the German film company Ufa.[43] This plan was not successful. Between March and November 1941, Storck had repeatedly contacted another company, Tobis. Initially with its subsidiary in Brussels, but soon primarily with its Berlin-based parent company, film producer Tobis Filmkunst GmbH, more specifically with its Kulturfilmstelle and the related Degeto-Kulturfilm GmbH in Berlin. It is also possible that Tobis was the first to reach out.[44] Around this time, the PAB and Tobis had commissioned German director Alfred Ehrardt to make two documentaries about Belgium.[45] For Ehrhardt's film, Tobis wanted to purchase some footage, but for the most part sounds, from Storck's *Bells of Belgium* (1936). Storck accepted and simultaneously succeeded in getting Tobis interested in the distribution rights for *Views of old Belgium* (1936).[46] In June 1941, in the middle of his negotiatons with Tobis, Storck suddenly found himself in a difficult position when the PAB no longer recognised him as a producer. Storck informed Tobis of this, most likely hoping that it would be a lever to solve his problems. The following quote indicates how strongly Storck wanted this:

> We must, however, point out that the undersigned film director of our company has not yet received the necessary authorization for production from the competent authorities. The difficulties appear to have arisen from regrettable misunderstandings, of which we have been the victims. An erroneous impres-

35. Correspondence in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, file 7.
36. Various letters between the Syndicate Chamber, Vanderheyden, Storck and the PAB (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 2).
37. Letter from the PAB to the Syndicate Chamber, 21 August 1941 (SAB-GF).
38. "Ik hoop, dat de vermoedens, die bestonden ten opzichte van mijn afstamming en lieten veronderstellen, dat ik Joodsch bloed in de aderen heb, aldus volledig zullen verzwinden." Letter from Storck to Vanderheyden, 13 August 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 2). This is not cited by Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*.
39. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 88.
40. Deposition by witness Storck Henri-Joseph, 27 June 1947, 1 (SAB-GF).
41. *Symphonie Paysanne* (French) or *Boerensymfonie* (Dutch).
42. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 47-49.
43. Note 'sémaine 9 décembre' [1940] (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 2).
44. Unless otherwise stated, this paragraph is based on correspondence found in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 7 and in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3. See also Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 51-54 and 58-59.
45. Roel Vande Winkel, "Flanderns Germanisches Gesicht". Thomas Tode, *Alfred Ehrardt Film,* Berlin, 2026, 163-166 and 233-235.
46. The original titles of the films, respectively in Dutch and in French, are *De Beiaarden - Les carillons* (1936) and *Beelden uit het Belgisch verleden - Regards sur la Belgique ancienne* (1936).

> sion has taken hold as though we are not favourably disposed toward German-Belgian cooperation. This view is, we repeat, entirely without foundation. On the contrary, our entire activity is directed toward demonstrating our strongest commitment to promoting mutual understanding and closer relations between Germans and Belgians in the field of film, in agreement with the Propaganda Department Belgium in Brussels. The preliminary discussions we have conducted with your esteemed company likewise constitute proof of this.[47]

Shortly afterwards, when Storck regained his accreditation as a producer, he informed his contacts in Berlin with great enthusiasm that the negotiations could be finalised.[48] He also had ideas for films that could be made in cooperation with them in the future. At the end of November 1941, things went wrong again. At the instigation of the PAB, Berlin put an end to the negotiations.[49] The exact circumstances remain unclear, but the door was closed and remained so.

In August 1941, during the same period in which he was supposedly not working, Storck received approval from the PAB to make a propaganda film for the the National Agriculture and Food Corporation (CNAA).[50] This parastatal organisation, set up in August 1940, organised food production, distribution, processing, and rationing. It was a corporatist, New Order oriented body, led throughout the war by a member of the VNV. Storck's film project would denounce black market practices in order to promote the CNAA-led economy and rationing. The film was to be shot in two different versions. The Flemish nationalist critic Jeanne de Bruyn would provide the script for the Flemish version, while well-known dramatist Fernand Crommelynck was recruited for the French-language version.[51] Storck and the CNAA signed a contract in August 1941.[52] Storck worked intensively on the project for months. However, at the beginning of March 1942, it became clear that the film would never be made. The PAB ultimately vetoed a feature-length film, seeing the subject of the black market as too sensitive. The alternative, reducing the project to a short film, was unacceptable for the CNAA.[53]

Storck, resourcefully, convinced the CNAA not to cancel the contract but to convert it into a project about Belgian agriculture. He proposed making a series of short films, which could eventually be combined into a feature-length film. Storck suggested "Such a film is a very useful weapon, because it shows the hard life and difficulties of farming, it reminds people of the nobility of the farmer's task and the eternity of his role in society."[54] This quote shows that Storck perfectly under-

47. "Wir müssen jedoch erwähnen, dass der unterzeichnete Filmregisseur unserer Gesellschaft bisher seitens der kompetenten Behörden die erforderliche Bewilligung zur Produktion noch nicht erhalten hat. Die Schwierigkeiten scheinen durch bedauerliche Missverständnisse hervorgerufen, deren Opfer wir sind. Es hat irrigerweise den Anschein gewonnen, als wären wir für eine deutsch-belgische Zusammenarbeite nicht günstig gestimmt. Diese Ansicht entbehrt, wir wiederholen es, jeder Grundlage. Unsere ganze Tätigkeit ist im Gegenteil dahin gerichtet, unser größtes Bestreben für ein gegenseitiges besseres Verständnis und für eine Annäherung zwischen Deutschen und Belgiern auf dem Gebiete des Films, in Übereinstimmung mit der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien in Brüssel, zu zeigen. Die von uns mit Ihrer gesch. Firma geführten Vorbesprechungen sind gleichfalls ein Beweis hierfür." Letter from Henri Storck to Degeto-Kulturfilm GmbH, 13 June 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 7). This is not cited by Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*.

48. Letter from Henri Storck to Tobis-Filmkunst GmbH, 25 June 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 7).

49. Letter from Tobis-Filmkunst GmbH to Henri Storck, 27 January 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 7).

50. *Corporation nationale de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation* (French) or *Nationale Landbouw- en Voedingscorporatie* (Dutch).

51. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 54–55. Letter from Henri Storck to the Syndicate Chamber, 18 August 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, file 6).

52. Contract between CEP (Henri Storck) and CNAA (Piet Meeuwissen), initialled by Secretary-General Emiel De Winter, 18 August 1941 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.4, folder 3).

53. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 59. Correspondence about these film plans can also be found in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 6.

54. "Zoo een film is een zeer nuttig wapen, want hij toont het harde leven en de moeilijkheden van het boeren leven, hij herinnert de menschen aan de edelheid van de taak van de boer, en aan de eeuwigheid van zijn rol en van zijn sociale functie." Henri Storck, preparatory note, quoted in Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 61.

stood what buttons he had to push to convince the CNAA, which published a magazine entitled *Soil and Nation (Volk en Bodem – Terre et Nation)*, of the promotional and ideological potential of this project. After some time, CNAA took the bait. In March 1942, permission was obtained from the PAB to shoot several short agricultural documentaries.[55] Storck would end up making five films: one about each season and a fifth about a peasant wedding. Storck worked on them from March 1942 to May 1944 and, after the war, effectively combined them into the nearly two-hour-long *Peasant Symphony* (1942-1944). The production process of the individual films has been meticulously researched by Benvindo. For the purposes of this article, it suffices to note that producing a film, in an occupied country, throughout several seasons, was difficult. It did not help that many farmers were fierce opponents of the CNAA's dirigiste agricultural policy and therefore did not want to be filmed.[56] Storck's work was also seriously delayed by the illness and death of his wife, the mother of their two young children.[57] *Spring*, the first film in the series, was first shown to the public at the end of August 1942, but it was not until nine months later, at the end of May 1943, that it actually reached the cinema circuit.[58] It would be the only of the five films to be commercially exploited during the occupation.

On 13 June 1944, the five short films were for the first time screened publicly and collectively. The screening, with French commentary, was presented as an intimate private gathering but five hundred people were invited, including various officials from the CNAA.[59] Plans to screen the Dutch-language cycle in its entirety two days later were cancelled, much to Storck's disappointment, because official permission was not granted.[60] Although some films were subsequently screened individually during private screenings, the CNAA and Storck were unable to find a distributor, or at least one that was willing to pay what they considered to be a sufficient price. The fact that, as discussed below, some films did not receive a distinction from the Film Guild, did not help. The relatively long duration of the individual films was also a stumbling block.[61]

IV. Henri Storck and the Film Guild

As mentioned above, in September 1943 it was announced that Henri Storck had been appointed deputy leader of Vanderheyden. Storck became deputy leader only within the Film Production group, not within the entire Film Guild, but that nuance may have been lost on some people. Shortly after the publication of this appointment in the Belgian Official Gazette, a report based on information obtained through the resistance was received in London. It stated: "The "people" of the Belgian film world (with the exception, of course, of the traitors) are asking themselves whether Henri Storck has gone mad to have let himself be appointed deputy chief, trailing behind the chief traitor, Jan Vanderheyden."[62]

How did Storck end up in that situation? In July-August 1943, he had been asked to take on that role. He consulted Marcel Coppens, who had been chairman of the Syndicate Chamber before the German invasion and would resume that position after the liberation. Coppens advised Storck to refuse. Storck

55. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 62.
56. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 72-74.
57. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 80-81.
58. *Lente* (Dutch) or *Le Printemps* (French).
59. Invitation, 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 8).
60. Correspondence between Henri Storck and Cinéma des Galeries, 14 June 1944 to 16 June 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.4, folder 3).
61. At the end of June 1944, the PAB suggested Storck to make some installments shorter. See correspondence in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 3.
62. "Les 'gens' du cinéma, en Belgique (à part les traîtres bien entendu) se demandent si Henri Storck est devenu fou, de s'être laisser bombarder chef suppléant, à la remorque du traître en chef Jan Vanderheyden." Rapport promis, Service Marc Feuille 268 courrier Y2 du II/X/43 (7 October 1943) (CegeSoma, AA 1417/80, Gilde du Film).



1934 CEP 1944

A l'occasion du dixième anniversaire de sa fondation, la société anonyme belge de production cinématographique « CINEMA - EDITION - PRODUCTION » vous prie de lui faire l'honneur d'assister à une projection privée des films de sa dernière production :

« SYMPHONIE PAYSANNE »

qui aura lieu au **CINÉMA DES GALERIES,** *26, Galerie de la Reine le* **mardi 13 juin, à 16.30 heures.**

Le Conseil d'Administration,
Albert DASNOY. René MOULAERT,
Henri STORCK.

« SYMPHONIE PAYSANNE »

Cette suite comprend 4 films documentaires :

I. **LE PRINTEMPS.**
II. **L'ÉTÉ.**
III. **L'AUTOMNE.**
IV. **L'HIVER.**

et un film de court-métrage intitulé :

NOCES PAYSANNES.

Réalisation :	Henri STORCK
Musique :	Pierre MOULAERT
Commentaire :	Marie GEVERS
Speaker :	Marcel JOSZ
Directeur de Production :	Jos. VAN BLADEL

Invitation to the first-ever joint public screening of the films that would later, after the liberation, be edited together as Peasant Symphony. The event was organised as a private screening on the late afternoon of 13 June 1944 at the Cinéma Galeries. According to the invitation, the "symphony" consisted of four documentaries, each devoted to a different season, from spring to winter. A fifth film on a peasant wedding was presented as an additional short rather than as part of the film itself; this would change later. The CNAA, which financed the film, is not mentioned on the invitation but was represented at the screening by several officials. Source: Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse de l'ULB, fonds Henri Storck, BE AULB Z 059, Z59-17.4, folder 2.

then visited the Ministry of Economic Affairs and effectively said that he was not interested.[63] Nevertheless, an announcement of his appointment was published in the Belgian Official Gazette at the end of September 1943. Storck protested, to no avail, to Secretary-General Victor Leemans and Frans Dupont.[64] Eventually, however, he accepted the position and began attending meetings of the Film Production group. Why this change? That remains a matter of speculation. After the war, Storck continued to emphasise that he had been appointed against his will.[65] He claimed to have been forced to accept the position by Jan Vanderheyden, who had supposedly threatened to stop his *Peasant Symphony.*[66] After the war, Vanderheyden vehemently denied so, both in writing and verbally. Vanderheyden stated that Storck had been appointed at the insistence of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and had agreed to this. Vanderheyden claimed that Storck had repeatedly been in touch with the PAB and added, "I refuse Mr Storck the right to lecture me on patriotism."[67] It is indeed possible that Storck was pressured by the Ministry rather than by Vanderheyden to sit on the Film Guild. Another explanation, possibly in combination with the previous one, is that Storck simply resigned himself to the situation. After all, Storck had gotten used to turning his coat with the wind. During the same period (September 1943) he protested to the Film Guild because he had received a French-language membership card. He wrote, in Dutch, for the 'mistake' to be corrected and for a Dutch-language card to be issued.[68] The decision to explicitly profile himself as Flemish, as he had already done in April 1941, was strategic: he hoped to have more opportunities within the Film Guild as a Flemish filmmaker than as a French-speaking one. So, it is likely that Storck chose to cut his losses and ultimately accept the appointment. It may also have become clear to him that the position of deputy did not entail much, since Vanderheyden wanted to remain in control as leader and did not need a replacement. There is no evidence that Storck ever acted as Vanderheyden's deputy. Storck did, however, actively participate in some meetings. In December 1943 he also drew up a report on the (difficult) distribution of cultural films in Belgium. This report, adressing Vanderheyden as "Esteemed Leader" once again showed the very submissive attitude that the director adopted. It is impossible to determine in retrospect whether Storck meant this or whether he wanted to flatter Vanderheyden's ego.[69]

In October 1943, Storck was also made a member of the Disciplinary Council of the Film Production group.[70] After the war, Storck claimed that this too had happened without his knowledge and that he had only attended one meeting of the disciplinary committee.[71] This cannot be verified, but Storck certainly attended meetings of another disciplinary council.[72] Storck's ambivalent attitude towards the Film Guild during this period is also evident from his request to Victor Leemans' cabinet secretary to persuade Charles Dekeukeleire to also accept a position in the Film Guild.[73] Did Storck want to involve Dekeukeleire because

63. Statement by Karel Engelbeen, 30 March 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9). Rapport sur l'activité de Henri Storck durant l'occupation allemande, 16 November 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, file 3).
64. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 90. Letter from Henri Storck to Leemans, 28 September 1943 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, file 8). After the liberation, Frans Dupont and Henri Storck exchanged documents confirming each other's patriotism in occupied Belgium. Note au sujet de l'activité de de M. Storck au sein de la Gilde du Film (Frans Dupont, 25 October 1944) (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, file 9). Statement by Henri Storck, 25 May 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, file 8).
65. Deposition by witness Storck Henri-Joseph, 27 June 1947 (SAB-GF).
66. *Ciné-Presse,* 31 May 1949, p. 4.
67. "Je refuse à Mr Storck le droit de vouloir me donner des leçons de patriotisme." Réfutation témoignage de Storck (Vanderheyden, undated response to Storck's witness statement of 27 June 1947) (ADVN, Walter Opsomer Archive, 92/316).
68. Letter from Storck to the secretary-general of the Film Guild (Robert Vanden Neste), 1 September 1943 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 3).
69. "Geachte heer Leider". Letter from Storck (signing in his capacity of 'Deputy Leader of the Production Group') to the leader of the Film Guild [Vanderheyden], 11 December 1943 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9).
70. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, p. 91.
71. Deposition by witness Storck Henri-Joseph, 27 June 1947 (SAB-GF).
72. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*, 91-92, also comes to this conclusion.
73. Letter from Storck to Michielsen, 15 November 1943 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 4).



Storck's membership card for the Film Guild, signed by Vanderheyden and Storck. The stamped date suggests that the card was issued on 18 August 1943 ; however, the Film Guild was officially established on that same day. The card was therefore probably issued at a later date. The card is bilingual, but the information was filled in, according to Storck's preferences, in Dutch. Consequently, both the address, the group he belonged to ("film production") and his professional description ("director of cultural films") appear in Dutch. The term cultuurfilms was a translation of the German term Kulturfilm and was regularly used to describe documentaries, educational films and propaganda films. Source : Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse de l'ULB, fonds Henri Storck, BE AULB Z 059, Z59-241.3, folder 3.

they had jointly urged the secretary-general in 1941 to create what would later become the Film Guild? In any case, the attempt failed. Storck held representative positions in the Film Guild. Dekeukeleire did not.

Six months after his appointment, on 31 March and 1 April 1944, not coincidentally after he had completed all five films that would form *Peasant Symphony,* Storck informed Jan Vanderheyden and Victor Leemans respectively that he was unable to continue his activities.[74] Storck, cautiously, did not use the word "resignation" in his letter, but cited health reasons. He argued he was unable to continue his film production and therefore had to be replaced.[75] The implicit resignation was not accepted. Storck continued to be invited to meetings, which he did not attend. In June, two months after reporting sick, Storck informed Victor Leemans that he had resigned (a word he now used) on 31 March.[76] On 24 August 1944, he explicitly asked Vanderheyden, by registered letter, to accept his resignation.[77] This letter most likely remained unanswered. The Allies were advancing on Belgium and Vanderheyden was preparing to flee to Germany.

Did Storck derive any benefits from his positions in the Film Guild? There is no evidence of this. On the contrary. In February 1944, the Committee for the Encouragement of National Film Production decided to amend its rules. Before viewing a new installment of Storck's cycle (*Summer,* 1944), the committee decided that "films undertaken on behalf of a propaganda organisation such as the CNAA" could still receive a distinction but would no longer be eligible for an additional 2 % of the distributor's income.[78] The measure was clearly directed against Storck's film as well as against *Rapeseed* (1944), a short film by Charles Lengnich, also financed by the CNAA.[79] By consequence, *Summer* received a distinction, but not the financial benefits. Benvindo is unaware of this decision and therefore argues that Storck did receive the financial benefit and that this is an example of the "undeniable advantages" *(avantages incontestables)* that Storck derived from his position.[80] It must emphasied that Storck did not receive that support and that, by consequence, Storck's position within the Film Guild could not prevent or reverse a negative decision that affected him financially. More than two months later, in April, when Storck had already withdrawn from the Film Guild, the committee unanimously decided not to award a distinction to another film of his series, *Peasant Wedding* (1944).[81]

V. After the Liberation: The Long Shadow of the Occupation

After the liberation, the Film Guild was abolished. The revived Syndicate Chamber, just like several other civil organisations, embarked on a process of internal purging *(épuration)* and installed a committee for it. People found guilty of charges brought against them by the purging committee could be punished with (1) A reprimand, (2) A warning,

74. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 92-93. A letter of resignation to the higher disciplinary council, dated 14 April 1944, can be found in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.1, folder 5.
75. Letter from Storck to Vanderheyden, 31 March 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9).
76. Letter from Storck to Leemans, 1 June 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9). This is indeed dated 1 June 1944, not 1 April, as stated in Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 92-93.
77. Registered letter from Storck to Vanderheyden, 24 August 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9).
78. "…films, die ondernomen worden voor de rekenschap van een propaganda-organisme (bij voorbeeld, voor de Nationale Corporatie van Landbouw), alleen zullen genieten van de passeerverplichting verbonden aan het waardepredicaat. De filmverhuurders zullen dus, in 't vervolg, voor zulke films, de 2 % bijpercent niet meer moeten afstaan." Report on the meeting of the committee, 7 February 1944 (SAB-GF). The film was titled *Zomer* (Dutch) or *L'été* (French).
79. *Het Koolzaad* (Dutch) or *Le Colza* (French).See the correspondence on this subject (includig Vanderheyden's reaction to a protest letter from the CNAA) in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 3.
80. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 92.
81. *Boerenbruiloft* (Dutch) or *Noces Paysannes* (French). Rapport sur la réunion de la Commission d'encouragement aux films nationaux de court-métrage, 21 April 1944 (SAB-GF). Letter from the Film Guild (Frans Dupont) to Henri Storck, 9 May 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 3). Letter from Henri Storck to the CNAA (W. Melis), 2 May 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.5, folder 2).

(3) A fine, (4) Temporary exclusion, or (5) Permanent exclusion.[82] At the end of November 1944, the committee published its first internal report.[83] This showed that 95 individuals and companies had been assessed in 14 sessions and that around 20 cases were still pending. A total of 107 people had been summoned to testify, but not everyone had complied, because as a civil committee, the purge committee could not force people to testify. It is not known when the committee ceased its activities. Its files are presumed lost. This means that an important source of information about the wartime activities of Belgian film distributors and producers is missing. In the autumn of 1944, the Belgian Ministry of National Defence, taking over the role of the Allied Information Service - Film Section, also took it upon itself to check the antecedents of people who wanted to resume work in the Belgian film world. Initially, the focus was on cinema owners.[84] From 15 December 1944, checks were tightened and expanded. From then on, anyone who wanted to produce, distribute, or screen films had to apply for a licence from the Ministry of Defence, which had set up a Cinematographic Control Unit *(Service du Contrôle Cinématographique)* for this purpose.[85] Meanwhile, since the Belgian military court had received jurisdiction over prosecutions for collaboration during the Second World War, the Office of the Auditor General in Brussels was also collecting data and carrying out investigations on organisations such as the Film Guild and its leaders.

How Henri Storck fared during this period is quite well documented, because Storck kept several important documents and because the trade press of the time sometimes reported on him and his colleagues. Based partially on Bruno Benvindo's research, but mostly on the analysis of the original sources, the events can be summarised as follows.[86]

In the first weeks after the liberation, Storck was not questioned about his activities. This did not prevent him from preparing his defence. As early as 1 September 1944, as the Germans were leaving Brussels, Storck had already contacted Marcel Coppens, whom he (rightfully) expected would again become head the Syndicate Chamber.[87] Storck described how he had (1) Refused a position with the Film Guild, (2) Noticed that his appointment had nevertheless been published, (3) Eventually taken up the position in order to be allowed to finish his films, (4) Resigned on 31 March 1944 as soon as his films were completed. No reply from Coppens has been preserved. In October 1944, Storck contacted Coppens again. Storck had picked up rumours that he (Storck) had made films for the Germans and wanted to refute this.[88] Coppens replied the same day that a purging committee would be set up within the Syndicate Chamber, that Storck would be investigated like everyone else and that, if his story was true, he had nothing to worry about.[89]

In November 1944, Storck's peace was repeatedly interrupted. The first reason was a debate in the press about the Brussels film school Narafi-Inraci, where Storck, like Dekeukeleire, had been teaching. On 16 November, the newspaper *La Libre Belgique* published a letter from March 1941, written by Jozef Van Dijck, director of that school and

82. *La cinégraphie belge,* 25 November 1944, 6.
83. Commision d'épuration et d'embauche: résumé du travail accompli, 4 December 1944 (SAB, I 638-210). These figures were also published in *La cinégraphie belge,* 25 November 1944, 6 and in *Ciné Belge,* 8 December 1944, 1. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 105 mentions 197 witnesses, but this is a typographical error.
84. Some documents are preserved by the Belgian General Information and Security Service (ADIV-S-CA, Classified Archives Section, MLV/1945/P3).
85. *La Cité Nouvelle,* 15 December 1944, 2. *Ciné Belge,* 19 December 1944, 3. See also various documents in ADIV-S-CA, Classified Archives Section, MLV/1945/P3.
86. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 103-135.
87. Letter from Storck to Coppens, 1 September 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9).
88. Letter from Henri Storck to "Monsieur le Président de la Chambre Syndicale des Distributeurs" [Marcel Coppens], 18 October 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).
89. Letter from the Chambre Syndicale Belge de la Cinématographie (Marcel Coppens) to Henri Storck, 18 October 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).

very sympathetic to the New Order.[90] In this letter, Van Dijck had sought rapprochement with Tobis-Degeto and had boasted the fact that Dekeukeleire and Storck taught at his school and formed a "Working Community for Flemish Cultural Film". After the publication in *La Libre Belgique* Dekeukeleire and Storck immediately released a press statement. Van Dijck's letter had been written without their knowledge or approval. This was most likely correct, but Storck did not mention that he had personally had several contacts with Tobis during this period, without Van Dijck's intervention. In any case, the written statement by Dekeukeleire and Storck, supported by the new board of Narafi-Inraci (which had asked Storck to play a role in the relaunch of that institution after the liberation), was accepted and taken up by the press.[91] The incident was thus closed. Or so it seemed.

During the same period, Storck wanted to travel professionally to France. However, one was only allowed to work abroad if one could prove not to have done anything reprehensible during the occupation. To obtain a statement to that effect from the Syndicate Chamber, Storck had to provide a detailed report on his wartime activities. He must have done so convincingly, since, on 28 November 1944, Marcel Coppens wrote a statement, declaring that Storck had provided sufficient information and would not be required to appear before the purging committee that had been set up in the meantime. An interesting detail in light of later discussions: Coppens, whose son had been in the resistance and had been executed by the Germans, not only informed his French colleagues that there were no objections to Storck, but added that his film *Peasant Symphony* "did not represent any propaganda for the New Order".[92] During this period, Storck was also allowed to make *The World of Paul Delvaux* (1944), a short film about the famous painter.[93] All this indicates that Storck was not under suspicion in the first months following the liberation. And yet, in the course of 1945, Storck was the subject of several investigations by various civil and legal authorities.

In February 1945, as CEP wanted to pursue its activities, the production company was required to fill out and submit a questionnaire about its wartime activities to the Ministry of Defence. This was standard procedure. Storck completed the questionnaire personally and stated that his company had been inactive from 10 May 1940 to March 1942 because he had been banned from working.[94] As demonstrated above, this was a blatant distortion of the truth. CEP and Storck had indeed been unable to make any films during that period. However, Storck had made various attempts to collaborate with Ufa, Tobis, and the CNAA. The contract with the latter institution, for a propaganda film against the black market, which was eventually transformed into a contract for *Peasant Symphony,* even dated from August 1941. In the same questionnaire, Storck answered "no" to the question of whether his company had proposed making films for enemy companies.[95] Storck got away with this lie because the Ministry's Cinematographic Control Unit was not aware of his contacts, in 1941, with Tobis. Meanwhile, the Office of the Auditor General, most likely as part of a larger investigation into the Film Guild, found two documents that actually proved those contacts: letters that Storck had sent to the Brussels branch of Tobis in early March 1941, offering to make films for them.[96] Fortunately for Storck, only these letters were found and not his later letters

90. *La Libre Belgique,* 16 November 1944, 3.
91. "Cinématographie national-socialiste avec les subventions… de l'Etat. MM. Ch. Dekeukeleire et H. Storck ont été abuvisement mis en cause." *La Libre Belgique,* 19 November 1944,3. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 97-98 and 110-113.
92. "Ce film ne répresente aucune propagande dans un sens quelconque pour l'ordre nouveau". Letter from Marcel Coppens to Jean Painlevé, 28.11.1944. A copy of the complete letter can be found in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3 and in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1. The fact that Storck kept several copies of the letter is telling.
93. *De wereld van Paul Delvaux* (Dutch) or *Le monde de Paul Delvaux* (French).
94. Questionnaire, 3 February 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3).
95. Idem.
96. There were two letters, both sent on 4 March 1941 : one to Tobis director Anton Dietz and one to his Belgian colleague Henri Swalens. See file "incivisme n° 8433, Storck, Henri" (SAB).

to the German parent company, quoted earlier in this article, in which he expressed his willingness to collaborate with Tobis and the PAB. The Office of the Auditor General did not share the letters with the Cinematographic Control Unit. A brief separate investigation into Storck was conducted, but the case was closed in March 1945.[97] As far as is known, no further investigations were conducted by the Office of the Auditor General or the Ministry of Defence. Storck did however eventually have to appear before two different civil purging committees on three occasions.

On 19 February 1945, Storck, was heard by a committee of the Belgian Association of Professional Artists.[98] He was acquitted.[99] A few weeks later he was informed that new charges had been brought against him and that he had to appear before the same committee.[100] The new elements were probably based on information that the chairman of the committee, Belgian artist and resistance fighter René Lyr, had obtained from poet and occasional filmmaker Pierre Bourgeois. The latter had emphasised in a lengthy letter that Belgian cinema should not be deprived of a talent such as Storck, but also clearly indicated that he resented Storck's behaviour during the war and referred, among other things, to his activities within the Film Guild, his contacts with Tobis and his film production for the collaborating CNAA.[101] On 27 March 1945, Storck was questioned again, this time, despite his protests, by a larger committee.[102] Storck had to respond to Bourgeois' letter and was asked questions about his activities in the Film Guild, the production of *Peasant Symphony,* his contacts with Tobis (the letters found by the Auditor General had ended up with the committee), and the infamous letter from Van Dijck published by *La Libre Belgique* in November 1944.[103] The committee had prepared thoroughly and had organised a private screening of *Peasant Symphony* a few days before. But Storck had also come prepared and had enlisted the services of renowned lawyer and future Minister of Justice Paul Struye.[104] Storck prevailed and was fully acquitted on 7 April 1945. He was also able to arrange for some committee members, with whom he had apparently built up a good relationship, to pass his file to Marcel Coppens.[105] Storck did so because he had learned that, in spite of Coppens' earlier statement to the contrary, the Syndicate Chamber's purge committee also wanted to question him.[106] He probably hoped that Coppens would persuade the committee to accept the decision of the Belgian Association of Professional Artists and acquit him without a hearing. However, things turned out differently.

Marcel Coppens, who had always defended Storck until then, was shocked when he read the file from the Belgian Association of Professional Artists. He wrote to Storck: "You know how outspoken I am. I will not hide from you that I was rather disappointed with some of the documents in this file. [...] I think you should expect a sanction in any case, because the facts seem to me to be undeniably serious and your behaviour is really open

97. Idem.
98. This was the *Commission nationale d'épuration des arts et des lettres* of the *Association des Artistes Professionnels de Belgique.*
99. Correspondence in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1.
100. Letter from the Commission nationale d'épuration des arts et des lettres (Maurice Casteels) to Storck, 10 March 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).
101. Letter from Pierre Bourgeois to René Lyr, 8 March 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1). As Benvindo (2010, 114-115) points out, Bourgeois himself had been a member of the Film Guild and a lecturer at Inraci-Narafi during the war.
102. Registered letter from the Commission nationale d'épuration des arts et des lettres (Maurice Casteels) to Storck, 19 March 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, file 1).
103. Affaire Storck, cinéaste, membre de la AAPB, comparution de Storck devant la Commission d'Enquête, le 27.3.1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, file 1).
104. Letter from Paul Struye to Henri Storck, 19 March 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, file 3).
105. This is evident from a series of documents in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1.
106. Letter from the Syndicate Chamber to Henri Storck, 8 February 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).

to criticism."[107] Storck defended himself fiercely. He pointed out that some elements in the file had already been refuted and the films he had wanted to make for Tobis, would have been innocent documentaries, produced entirely under his control. He plead Coppens to talk to him personally before releasing the file.[108] It is not clear whether Coppens responded but a few days later Storck was officially asked to appear before the purge committee of the Syndicate Chambre. The invitation shows that he would have to answer for three matters: the filming of *Peasant Symphony,* the attempt to make films for Tobis, and the positions he had taken up in sections of the Film Guild.[109]

Storck appeared before the committee on 7 May 1945 and was allowed to bring several defence witnesses. Prior to this meeting, the members of the committee had also viewed *Peasant Symphony.*[110] While Storck's lawyer Paul Struye addressed the committee members, celebrations erupted in the streets of Brussels. That night, German General Jodl had accepted unconditional surrender in France.[111] No minutes of the meeting have been preserved. The documents Storck wrote to prepare his defence show that he once again dealt selectively with the past, concealing or embellishing certain events. For example, he claimed that, as a patriot, he had voluntarily joined the Film Guild to counter the influence of Vanderheyden and those sympathetic to the Germans. The fact that René Evers, a farmer who appeared in Storck's *Spring* installment of *Peasant Symphony,* had been arrested and shot months later for resistance activities was used by Storck to give himself an aura of resistance.[112]

What conclusion did the Syndicate Chamber's purge committee ultimately reach? The remarkable answer is probably: no conclusion. Months later, in December 1945, Storck and Struye assumed that the proceedings were still pending.[113] But nothing happened and no formal, written judgement was ever issued. Was this common practice? Were the committee members divided and did they allow themselves more time to reach a decision? Was the purging committee abolished before the case was closed? As long as the archives do not surface, one can only guess. What is clear is that Storck eventually decided that no news was good news. When Piet Vermeylen, who, like Storck, was one of the founders of the Royal Film Archive, asked in January 1947 for an update, Storck wrongly stated that he had appeared before that committee at his own request. He continued: "My appearance had no consequences; I received no sanction or reprimand. I did not undergo any other disciplinary measures."[114] Two days later,

107. "Vous connaissez ma franchise brutale […] je pense que, de toute façon, vous devez vous attendre à une sanction, car les faits me paraissent avoir une gravité indéniable et votre attitude est vraiment susceptible d'être critiquée." Letter from Maurice Coppens to Henri Storck, 23 April 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).
108. Letter from Henri Storck to Maurice Coppens, 26. April 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).
109. "Par la présent, je vous invite à comparaître le lundi 7 [...] en vue de vous expliquer au sujet des faits suivants: 1° Avoir entre le 10 mai 1940 et le 1.9.44 tourné des films de propagande en faveur d'un organisme anticonstitutionnel et illégal créé à l'initiative de l'autorité occupante, à savoir le film "Symphonie Paysanne" pour compte de la Corporation Nationale de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation. 2° Avoir le 4.3.41 proposé à une firme allemande à savoir la Sté. Tobis de lui céder des films qu'il avait mis en chantier / Cette proposition constituant une offre de collaboration économique avec l'occupant. 3° Avoir accepté de siéger à la direction d'organismes cinématographiques créés à l'initiative de l'occupant ou de ses collaborateurs et destinés à favoriser la propagande, la politique et les desseins de l'ennemi en Belgique occupée. Notamment (a) en septembre 1943 avoir accepté d'être nommé chef suppléant de la Gilde du Film (Moniteur Belge des 27 et 28.9.43), (b) en novembre 1943 avoir accepté de faire partie du Conseil du Groupement Professionnel Production du Film (c) en février 1944 avoir accepté de devenir membre du Conseil de Discipline de la Gilde du Film." Letter from the Syndicate Chamber to Henri Storck, 1 May 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1).
110. See various documents in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3.
111. Letter from the Syndicate Chamber to Henri Storck, 1 May 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 1). Letter from Paul Struye to Henri Storck, 12 May 1945 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3).
112. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 106–107.
113. See correspondence between Storck and Struye in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 3. This is not cited by Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck*.
114. "Aucune suite n'a été donnée à ma comparution, je n'ai été l'objet d'aucune sanction, ni blâme. Je n'ai eu affaire à aucune autre instance disciplinaire." Letter from Henri Storck to Piet Vermeylen, 9 January 1947 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.5, folder 1).

Storck wrote in the same terms to the Belgian writer Denis Marion.[115] Vermeylen, who was a solicitor, was not immediately satisfied with that explanation. It was possible that Storck's appearance before the purge committee had had no negative consequences and that no sanction or reprimand had been imposed. But Vermeylen insisted on a clear outcome, in black and white: "I suppose there must be a positive decision; I would very much like you to clarify this or, if you do not know, to request a copy of this decision from the Syndicate Chamber, because I very much fear that without this document, we will encounter difficulties that are best avoided from the outset."[116] Storck's response has not been preserved. But it is a fact that Storck's extensive personal archives, which sometimes contain multiple copies of documents that were important to him, do not contain any such positive decision from the Syndicate Chamber and/or its purge committee. One must therefore conclude that such a decision was never issued. Benvindo, however, does not seem to question Storck's interpretation.[117]

In any case, Vermeylen must have accepted that Storck was no longer under suspicion, as he no longer expressed any reservations about the screening, in 1947, of the complete *Peasant Symphony.*[118] The five short films had by then been edited into a feature-length film, as had always been the intention, and provided with an adapted soundtrack.[119] This new version was viewed and positively received on 25 April 1947 by an official committee chaired by Vermeylen that also included former resistance member François Rigot. This assesment of the film was part of negotiations that Storck conducted with the Ministry of Public Education about the possible distribution of the film.[120] From that same year, 1947, Storck also made commissioned films for, among others, the Belgian Commissariat-General for Tourism and the Ministry of Public Education. All this indicates that around 1947 a broad consensus had grown that Storck had not implicated himself during the Second World War.[121] This is corraborated by the fact that some years later Storck would make *Le banquet des fraudeurs* (*The Smugglers' Banquet,* 1952), a film scripted by Charles Spaak and co-funded by the Marshall Plan.

After the liberation, Storck, like everyone else in the film world, had been very quick to distance himself from Vanderheyden, who had fled to Germany. In 1944-1945, Storck was given the opportunity to write an article about the Belgian film industry during the occupation for the English-language *Documentary News Letter.* In a passage cut by the editors but retained in the original manuscript, Storck attacked Vanderheyden and his German partner Edith Kiel. Storck wrote:

> The Germans needed to find in Belgium a man wholly devoted to their ideology and willing, with enthusiasm, to carry out their programme. It must be admitted, to the shame of our country, that such a man did exist: a mediocre pro-

115. Letter from Henri Storck to Denis Marion, 11 January 1947 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.4, folder 3). This is also the main source for Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 106.

116. "Mon cher Ami, Tu m'écris qu'aucune suite n'a été donnée à ta comparution devant le Comité d'Épuration de la Chambre syndicale Belge du Cinéma, et qu'il n'y a eu aucune sanction ni aucun blâme. Je suppose qu'il doit y avoir une décision dans un sens positif; je voudrais beaucoup que tu précises cela ou, si tu ne le sais pas, que tu demandes une expédition de cette décision à la Chambre syndicale, car je crains fort que sans ce document, nous ne rencontrions des difficultés qu'il vaut mieux éviter dès l'abord." Letter from Piet Vermeylen to Henri Storck, 21 January 1947 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.5, folder 1).

117. "… le comité d'épuration du secteur cinématographique ne retient finalement rien contre le réalisateur et ne lui inflige ni blâme ni sanction". Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 106.

118. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 108-109.

119. Documents relating to the completion of the film can be found in ULB-ASH, Z59-17.4, folder 3.

120. Ministère de l'instruction publique - service cinématographique, François Rigot, 28 April 1947 (ULB-ASH, Z59-17.5, folder 1).

121. However, this consensus was not complete. In February 1949, the Belgian magazine *Front de la Résistance et de la Démocratie* reminded its readers that Storck had been active in the Film Guild during the occupation. Storck responded to this – for unclear reasons only in April – with a letter that the weekly magazine published and commented on (negatively). See press clippings in ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 9.

> ducer of Flemish films, one Jan Vanderheyden, whose companion was a German woman and a member of the Nazi Party — and, to complete the aberration, whose husband was Jewish. The fifth column had done its work well. [...] Vanderheyden took control of the distributors' organisation, and through his authoritarian nature and the terror he managed to instil by threatening the recalcitrant with the Gestapo, he succeeded in forcing the members of the industry to bow to his will.[122]

When Jan Vanderheyden returned from Germany to Belgium and was put on trial, along with two other leading figures of the Film Guild, in 1949, Storck was called as a witness. He stated again that he had been given a position at the Film Guild against his will, which Vanderheyden again denied.[123] Dozens of witnesses appeared at the same trial. Some of the defendants or their lawyers sometimes suggested publicly that some witnesses should have been in the dock instead. Accussations were raised against several people, including Marcel Coppens.[124] But apparently not against Henri Storck. Other events also indicate that Storck was not considered a suspect or collaborator by his contemporaries. It is significant that Storck played an important role in the fledgling Belgian film archive and was elected vice-president of two new Belgian professional organisations that were established after the war.[125] In other words, towards the end of the 1940s, Storck's activities during the occupation became a non-issue. This would remain the case for many decades.

As Storck grew older, he was increasingly celebrated as a pioneer of Belgian cinema and even international documentary cinema. In 1978, Storck was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Dutch-language *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (VUB). In 1979 he became a Commander in the Order of Leopold II. In 1988 the Henri Storck Foundation was established to preserve his oeuvre and archives, and in 1995 he received an honorary doctorate from the French-language *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB). Although Storck had spent his career making almost exclusively commissioned films, adapting himself primarily to the wishes of his patrons, he was attributed a left-wing signature based on his co-direction of *Borinage* with Joris Ivens. In addition, *Peasant Symphony* was screened worldwide at festivals as one of the ambassadors of Belgian cinema.[126] When Storck died in 1999, he had been canonised. All of this was viewed with a bitter envy by film maker André Cauvin, a member of the Belgian resistance who had been forced to flee Belgium during the war. Cauvin had invited Storck to his daughter's wedding in 1953. Later on, their relationship had soured. Cauvin found it difficult to accept that his film career had ended in the 1960s and been forgotten, as had his resistance activities, while Storck was gaining increasing recognition. Cauvin found it particularly hard to stomach that Storck had been awarded an honorary doctorate at the ULB, where Cauvin had studied himself. Cauvin, who was almost 90 years old at the time, began writing to various people after the honorary doctorate was awarded (1995) to label Storck as a collaborator. Cauvin distributed copies of the letter the director of Narafi-Inraci had written to Tobis-Degeto in 1941. Cauvin had already published a French translation of that letter in his 1988 book but had omitted the names of Dekeukeleire and Storck at

122. "…il fallait que les Allemands puissent trouver en Belgique un homme tout dévoué à leur idéologie et qui acceptât avec enthousiasme de réaliser leur programme. Il faut l'avouer à la honte de notre pays, cet homme exista ; c'était un producteur de films flamands médiocres, un nommé Jan Vanderheyden, dont l'amie était une Allemande membre du parti nazi et donc pour comble d' aberration le mari était juif. La cinquième colonne avait bien travaillé." L'industrie du cinéma en Belgique durant l'occupation allemande par Henri Storck [1944-1945], 5-6 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.2, folder 8). For the published version, see Henri Storck, "The Cinema Industry in Belgium during the Occupation", *Documentary News Letter,* 5/6, 1945, 68.
123. *Ciné-Presse,* 20 May 1949, p. 3.
124. *Ciné-Presse,* 21 June 1949, 4.
125. The *Comité national des travailleurs du film* (chairman Georges Lust) and the *Union des producteurs et des réalisateurs de films* (chairman Charles Dekeukeleire). Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 118.
126. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 120–121.

the time.[127] Each time, Cauvin omitted to mention that the evidence had already been weighed and found wanting in 1944 and that Storck had personally informed him of this in 1944.[128] Cauvin also sent his documentation to the French film historian Frédéric Sojcher, who referred to it in his voluminous history of Belgian cinema (based on his 1996 doctoral thesis), in which he also mentioned Storck's functions within the Film Guild.[129] Although Sojcher's work was widely reviewed and several other historians (Vincent Geens, Florence Gillet) urged further research, the publication did not cause a stir.[130] That changed in August 2006, when the French-language public broadcaster RTBF picked up information it had received from Michel Noirret, who was making a documentary about the now deceased Cauvin.[131] RTBF reported "exclusively" that Storck might have collaborated during the war. The report was picked up by the Belga press agency and then by several French- and Dutch-language newspapers and magazines.[132] This led to a media controversy and ultimately to the French Community of Belgium financing a research project into Storck's role during the occupation. All this ultimately led to Benvindo's research report, which was also published in book form in 2010.

VI. Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This article has focused on the professional activities of Henri Storck during the Second World War. The research presented here is by and large consistent with Benvindo's findings. Nevertheless, it also highlights other aspects and provides new information on Storck's opportunistic contacts with and behaviour towards the Syndicate Chamber/ Film Guild (particularly its leader Jan Vanderheyden) and the German film industry. The article shows that these contacts were more intense than Cauvin or other contemporaries, such as the members of the purge committees, were able to ascertain after the liberation. It is undeniable that Storck consistently lied about this from September 1944 on. Through all available evidence, it is also contended here that Storck probably never received any decision from the Syndicate Chamber's purge committee, whether negative (a reprimand or other sanction) or positive (a formal acquital).

Considering Storck's later image as an ideologically committed filmmaker, this article also shows that Storck was much less principled during the occupation than he preferred to remember after the liberation. The indignation with which he denied "having Jewish blood in his veins", the tenacity with which he presented himself as an outspoken Flemish filmmaker, the extensive praise he heaped on Jan Vanderheyden for his fight against "the foreign, the unnational and the artificial" in the cinema, the distance he took from his own pre-war productions such as *New Belgium* and even *Borinage,* the way he expressed his "strongest commitment to promoting mutual understanding and closer relations between Germans and Belgians in the field of film, in agreement with the Propaganda Department Belgium in Brussels"… These are remarkable facts that contrast sharply with Storck's post-war image. The portrait that emerges was already sketched in Benvindo's book but now becomes sharper. It is the portrait of a filmmaker who was not driven by the ideological motives later attributed to him, but primarily by economic considerations.

This article also shows that Storck was not really forced to sit on the Film Guild, as he would later claim, and that he also did not play a significant role there. His activities were limited to a max-

127. André Cauvin, *La liaison dangereuse,* Bruxelles, 1988, 28.
128. Letter from Henri Storck to Ms. Cauvin, 21 November 1944 (ULB-ASH, Z59-241.3, folder 7).
129. Frédéric Sojcher, *La kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge.* Tome I, Paris,1999, 44-46. That Sojcher obtained the documents via Cauvin is suggested in Sojcher's footnotes and confirmed by their correspondence. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 126.
130. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 12-13.
131. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 128.
132. Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 9-10.

imum of seven months, from early September 1943 to late March 1944. There is no indication that Storck harmed anyone during that period, for example by imposing unlawful disciplinary measures or favouring himself. On the contrary, this article proves, and this also enhances Benvindo's assessment, that in February 1944, when Storck was still in office, a specific rule was issued to prevent Storck from receiving extra money for the films he made for the CNAA. The responsible committee also decided not to give a distinction to the last film of his *Peasant Symphony* cycle.

To conclude this article, here are some observations and suggestions for further research. Both the meaning and the message of *Peasant Symphony* remain controversial. Scholars who have published on the film in recent decades do not so much question Storck's decision to work for the New Order organisation CNAA, but rather debate whether *Peasant Symphony* is imbued with a New Order spirit. This was suggested in 1994 by Italian film historian Leonardo Quaresima, who meant to uncover a blood and soil ideology in the film. Storck, who was still alive when Quaresima wrote this, immediately rejected this analysis.[133] Quaresima's ideological reading of the film, however still remains valid for some.[134] Others, like Benvindo, argue that the film, which did not refer to the German occupation or the war, did not contain any explicit ideological messages (which in itself was of course an ideological choice, as Benvindo also acknowledged) and, although dealing with themes that fit within the National Socialist world view (glorification of rural life, respect for folklore and traditions, connection between people, and the land on which they live), was not a National Socialist film.[135] It is worth observering that contemporaries of Storck, well acquainted with National Socialist cinema, viewing *Peasant Symphony* in 1947, did not take issue with it, in other words did not perceive the supposed parallel. Nevertheless, this topic could be investigated in greater detail. It must be pointed out that doing so would require analysing the five original films. It is too easily forgotten that the version that made the film famous and that scholars are familiar with, is a 1947 edit.[136] Anyone who really wants to get to the bottom of this should start with the original, individual films, as they premiered during the occupation and also pay attention to any differences between the Dutch-language and French-language versions. This is an avenue for further research.

It must also be admitted that research on documentary filmmaking in World War Two that focuses heavily on the case of Henri Storck – like this article – does not do justice to the context in which the director operated. For a more complete understanding of the circumstances in which filmmakers worked in occupied Belgium, it is necessary to zoom out and pay attention to other individuals who, like Storck, made documentary productions in occupied Belgium and were considered his peers. This concerns Gaston Schoukens, who held a representative position in corporate film organisations for a much longer time than Storck, signed the letter (along with Vanderheyden) that expulsed Dekeukeleire and Storck from the Syndicate Chamber in 1941 and who was allowed by the occupying forces to release some feature films and several documentaries. In particular, his films on the history of the city of Brussels and his possible collaboration with the city council deserve further research. The same applies to Charles Dekeukeleire, with whom Storck had a very good relationship and who made several documentaries during the occupation, including three films commissioned by Winter Relief (*Winterhulp – Secours d'Hiver*), a Belgian organisation that also had direct links with the occupying forces.

133. The analysis of Quaresima and the response of Storck were both published in Michele Canosa (ed.), *Henri Storck, il litorale belga,* Udine, 1994, 57-76 (Quaresima) and 76-77 (Storck).
134. See, for example, film historian's Daniël Biltereyst's opinion piece on the use of excerpts from Storck's *Peasant Symphony* in the documentary *Nelly & Nadine* (2022). *De Standaard,* 7 October 2022, 27.
135. Paraphrasing Bruno Benvindo (2010), *Henri Storck,* 69-71.
136. The Royal Belgian Film Archive, financially supported by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, released his version on DVD and Blu-ray in 2012.

These films also deserve further research, if only because they were deleted from Dekeukeleire's filmography more than ten years after his death, in a special issue dedicated to the director and published by the *Revue Belge du Cinéma* in 1982, for which Storck wrote the foreword.[137]

The circumstances under which Schoukens and Dekeukeleire made these films have not yet been studied in detail, and probably never will be, because the archives of these directors have not been preserved, at least not from this period. In conclusion, one must therefore acknowledge that this article may render a rather unflattering picture of Henri Storck, but that such a portrait can only be drawn because Storck preserved his archives and made them available to researchers through a foundation. Such openness requires courage.

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137. The filmography jumped from *L'Acier* (1939) to *La vie recommence* (1946).