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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

EFFECTS ON PUBLIC OPINION OF NEW SOVIET MOVES

Memorandum by the Netherlands Delegation

It can be stated that in general the "détente" does not appear to have had any significant effect on public opinion in the Netherlands. The willingness to bear the burden of the military effort has not been affected; on the contrary recently newspapers of different shades have advocated an increase of budgetary provisions for defence. If, on the other hand, arguments for shortening the duration of military service are heard from time to time, they have a direct economical background and cannot be ascribed to communist propaganda.

2. The large non-communist trade unions have in no perceptible way been open to communist influence; communist propaganda for united action, as for instance carried on in the communist daily "De Waarheid" (Truth) and in communist professional journals, is recognised as simply one more attempt at penetration. Action by communist trade unions, centering mainly on questions of wage increases, shortening of working hours and improvement of labour conditions, has left the non-communist trade unions undisturbed in their rejection of communist efforts at "rapprochement". Under these conditions the non-communist trade unions have up till now in no way shown interest in exchanging delegations with the Russians.

3. As far as religion is concerned it should be noted that the reports of a delegation of the Eucumenical Council of Churches which has visited the Soviet Union in the month of June 1955, have sounded rather an optimistic note concerning the present state of religion in the Soviet Union. It is however improbable that these reports have had much effect on public opinion in the Netherlands.

4. Up till now there have not been any visits to the Soviet Union by Ministers or other civil authorities. The same goes for parliamentarians and for political groups or political leaders other than those who are communist. The only visit by government officials to be recorded concerns a small agricultural delegation headed by the departmental Director-General for Agriculture, which in response to a Russian invitation, paid a visit to the Soviet Union during the month of September 1955. As a consequence of this visit a Russian agricultural delegation will visit the Netherlands during next spring.

5. In the field of the sciences three visits to the Soviet Union should be noted:

- (a) at the invitation of the Russian Academy of Sciences a Netherlands atomic specialist attended the conference on the peaceful use of nuclear energy held in Moscow at the beginning of July of this year;

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- (b) a representative of Leyden University was present at the ceremony for the 200th anniversary of Lomonosov University;
- (c) in response to an invitation received through the communist association "Netherlands-USSR" five physicians visited the Soviet Union in the first half of September 1955.

6. In contrast to the few exchanges in the above-mentioned spheres, mutual participation in sports contests has of late been rather frequent.

7. In the field of the arts traffic has up till now been one sided: a Russian folk dance company has given a number of performances in the Netherlands in the month of April 1954 and a Russian ballet company will probably come to the Netherlands in the course of next year.

8. There has thus been very little opportunity to judge the effect of exchanges on Russian public opinion. The only event suitable for observation in this respect was the large scale participation of the Netherlands Association of Florists in a flower show in Moscow last summer. This exhibit attracted much public attention.

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