

CINECENSURA

CENSORSHIP IN THE NEWS AND IN ADVERTISING SINCE 1946

by Alfredo Baldi

How are newsreels and short films (including commercial short films) defined by the law? In this article, we take a look at both the law in force between 1950 and 1965, and law no. 1213/65, in force for the remaining period of time relevant to this article. We shall also cite the incentives that producers and theatre owners had access to, thanks to those laws.

Law no. 29 of December 1949, no. 958 – Regulation for cinematography (in force from 1 January to 11 November 1965)

Art. 12. The measures defined by this law do not include films which, in part or as a whole, have advertising purposes.

Art. 15. For the purposes of this law, a short film is a film between 250 and 2000 metres, including animated pictures. In the event that the short film is shot in colour, it is eligible to receive the benefits of this law even with a length of 180 metres. A newsreel is a film longer than 200 metres, which features current events of the day in information and or film news.

Theatre owners screening, alongside the feature film, at least one Italian short film and a newsreel [...] are entitled to 2 percent rebate in taxes in accordance with the law (in act as of 1 January 1956).

In favour of the Italian short film [...], in compliance with the opinion of the technical Committee quoted in art. 4, an incentive equal to 3 percent of the gross takings of the screenings in which the movie has been projected for a period of three years since the first public showing. Within the limits of time and with the modalities established in the third clause of the present article, a contribution to the national newsreel film, equal to the 3 percent of the gross takings of the shows in which the film has been projected for a period of five months since the first public showing, is granted.

Art 17-bis. (in force since 1 January, 1965) At the end of every financial year, national films admitted to the mandatory programme and projected for the first time in front of an audience during the same year, can compete for the assignment of the following quality awards:

a)[...]

b) for short films in colour: 80 awards of 5 million liras each and, for short films in black and white, 40 awards of 3 million liras each, to be conferred to the producer.

In favour of the national short film [...], in compliance with the opinion of the technical Committee quoted in Art.4, a contribution of 3% of the gross takings for screenings in which the film has been projected for a period of three years since the first showing in front of an audience [...].

Law 4 November 1965, no. 1213 – New measures in favour of cinematography (in effect from 12 November 1965)

Art. 11. Quality awards

Short films can compete for the conferral of the following quarterly quality awards, which are meant to be divided as follows: 90% for the filmmaker, 8% for the director and 2% to the director of photography [...]:

- a) 2 awards of 10 million liras each;
- b) 8 awards of 7 million liras each;
- c) 20 awards of 5.5 million liras each.

Theatres showing at least one of these short films, alongside the full-length movie, will get a 3% reduction on state taxes in accordance with the law [...].

If the show wholly consists of Italian short movies, as stated in the above subsection, or of foreign short film, as stated in art. 18, the theatre owner will get a 50% reduction on state taxes in accordance with the law.

Art. 15. Show schedule

Theatres projecting one of the newsreels mentioned in the previous article as well as a full-length movie will get a 2% reduction on state taxes in accordance with the law [...].

Just a handful of articles, but enough to explain why such great numbers of this type of film – shorts and newsreels – were produced in the past: between tax breaks for theatre owners and awards for producers, there was more than enough cash to cover production costs. A real windfall!

News, or rather newsreels

The first big-screen movies in cinemas were the news-movies. All the first movies were news-movies, a film-version of real events unfolding. But the idea of a recurrent programme showing all the daily news came later. The first newsreel in Italy was *Giornale Luce*, produced by the Istituto LUCE, starting from 1927. The 3160 episodes of the newsreel were made from 1927 to 1945, until the fall of the Salò Republic.

From the ashes of *Giornale Luce* rose *Settimana Incom*, which was one of the most popular newsreels in Italy. It was founded in February 1946 by Sandro Pallavicini, who edited the newsreel until 1956; there were 2555 episodes from 1946 to 1965. After *Settimana Incom*, many other newsreels were founded. Many productions deserve a mention, like *Ieri-Oggi-Domani*, *L'Europeo*, *Caleidoscopio Ciac*, and many others produced by Angelo Rizzoli and directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti. But also the ones by Gianni Hecht Lucari, *Orizzonte Cinematografico* and *Film Giornale S.E.D.I.*, as well as *Radar*, *Cinecronaca*, and so on. The last ever Italian newsreel was *Settimanale Ciac*, which was distributed in Italy until the early 1990s.

The revision commissions intervened on the newsreels 116 times from 1946 (when the first data after the war is available) to 1978 (year of the last measures). They prohibited a part of the production 114 times, rejecting the entire production twice. If we estimate that there were around 8000 newsreels inspected in the period, that means that less than 1.5 percent were affected. Not a great deal. As for the reasons behind modifications, around 50 percent were due to “offence or defamation” to people or authorities, 25 percent for “erotic” content, 15 percent for containing “advertising”, and 4 percent for “macabre, repugnant or shocking” content. It is also interesting to note that the majority of the action taken – 53 out of 116, 47% of the total – was concentrated in the years between 1958 and 1961, while in the following 17 years, until 1978, there were only a total of 13 measures. This clearly shows that after an exploit by productions between the end of the 1950s and the start of the 1960s – a period in which this medium fruitlessly attempted to oppose the growing power of television – after 1962, there was an unstoppable reduction in the number of newsreels made, progressively replaced by the TV news programmes produced by RAI (from 1961).

The newsreel – which along with a documentary, accompanied every feature film shown on the big screen – began to represent, from the end of the 1950s a cautious, ironic protest (to mask its underlying intentions), a

rebellion against the political conformism of the RAI news programme, the only one being shown on TV at the time. RAI news was the stronghold of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrat) party and therefore, as far as the news broadcast, the tone adopted and its social and political representations was concerned, it held a distorting mirror up to society, an “official” vision, a conservative one, covering things up or minimizing, as far as possible, the most innovative and anti-conformist forces at work in Italian society. This was why the news was basically monotonous and boring; it was only the novelty of seeing it on TV that made it palatable. The newsreels, or at least some of them, tried to rebel against this ideological conformism, using irony or even mockery, transforming the news from reality into entertainment, almost mythologizing it. But this transposition – as it exposed those in power to mockery, thereby making the news more entertaining – was not looked upon kindly by politicians; so censorship was often used as repression when the news threatened to cross forbidden boundaries.

The following are just some important examples of measures adopted.

The first intervention was on 9 February 1946, on the first ever edition of

Settimana Incom which was cleared “on the condition that the scene on the Petacci sisters be eliminated”. 22 metres of film were cut from *L'Europeo n. 1167* in 1958: the scene was an ironic comment on the “generous upper-class ladies who throw themselves headlong into charity work for poor country kids” and, for the children, they become “ultra-generous hags. But, unfortunately, despite the charitable hags’ efforts, they don’t seem able to fill any stockings except their own nylon ones; notwithstanding their super-human efforts, they are unable to lose a single lira”. An edition of *Ieri-oggi-domani* from 1959 had 3.5 metres cut, showing Princess Grace of Monaco and the Italian President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi at an official ceremony, with the comment: “[...] authoritative and comely in a group of illustrious bit-part players”. 35 metres of film were cut from the 24 July 1959 edition of *Ieri-oggi-domani*, a piece on Filomena Guastafierro, a poverty-struck mother who, at the last minute, claimed back the two children she had given up for adoption to a rich American family, provoking controversy. Against the background of poverty and squalor, the comment: “Who is right? Everyone is right, until the causes and effects of this terrible misery is dealt with. Everyone will be right as long as we are tempted to thank whoever takes a child away from this incredible world in which children only wash their faces during watermelon season.”

Caleidoscopio Ciac no. 1219 of June 1960 had 2 metres cut: a scene showing a young white woman kissing a young black man. Such cuts, with racist motivations, were also made on feature films.

Episode no.41 of the current affairs series *7G* was examined on 18 April 1967 by the first degree commission which “was against giving the segment entitled “La Pillola” (*The Pill*) clearance for public screening as it was obviously propaganda for contraception which [...] reveals not only a clear offence to moral standards, but also a crime in accordance with art. 553 of the penal code currently in force”.

The same verdict was reached by the second degree commission on 21 April 1967. The wording of the article invoked, later repealed by law no. 194/78 (the so called “legge sull’aborto” – “abortion law”), was as follows:

Art. 553. Incitement to practises against procreation

Whosoever publicly incites practises against procreation or propagandizes in favour of such practises will be punishable with up to one year in prison or a fine of up to four hundred thousand liras. Both will be applied in conjunction if the act is committed for financial benefit.

The newsreel was presented again for revision on 3 May 1967. The producer declared that “the visual material of “La Pillola” has been partially replaced with different material (around 20 metres) specially shot for this purpose. The spoken narration has been completely redone, the whole piece being re-dubbed and re-mixed”. At this point, on 2 May 1967, the revision commission expressed a favourable outcome.

The last ever intervention, date-wise, was on 12 April 1978: *Radar Filmgiornale di attualità no. 883* was requested to cut from the piece "Gran ballo a Monaco", the "ball scene in which bare-breasted women appear, as it is offensive to moral standards".

Advertising films

There were only precisely 44 adverts that the revision commission intervened upon the period under examination. The first ever action was in 1949, the final one in 1977 (although in 1993 one was banned for the under-18s).

Let us examine a few random samples, in chronological order. In 1949 the advert for *Veramital*, a pain-relief product, was given authorisation on the condition that "the final drawing showing a naked woman was eliminated" (in actual fact, it was the image of a naked girl reflected in an Alpine lake).

From the film *Prima di tutto*, which promoted a carotene "aperitivo" drink, a scene in which a woman wearing a two-piece bathing costume was cut. In 1953 an advert entitled *Nava... del Chilimangiaro*, for a magazine of the same name,

was forced to cut scenes referencing "Togliatti's speech, the European Recovery Programme, minks and cows, representations of Switzerland". In 1954, a scene featuring an intravenous injection was asked to be cut from the short *Emoteca*, a promotional campaign film in favour of the blood donation association AVIS. In 1955, *Intervista con...*, which endorsed eating yoghurt on a daily basis as part of a beauty regime, was required to cut "the part in which the artist (Sophia Loren) appears in a skimpy swimsuit, including the scene in which she is sitting in front of a mirror with bare breasts". In 1956, *Lady Italia 1955*, an advert for "Stretch Pertes" stockings, was asked to eliminate "the four scenes in which girls can be seen putting stockings onto their bare legs up to their underwear". In 1961, *Dal punto di vista (Aranciata Staro)*, advertising the drink of the same name, was required to cut all scenes showing women sunbathing in scanty clothing and the scene of the man watching, through a hole, a girl dry herself off, deemed offensive to morality. In 1965, *Biancheria intima* – an ad for underwear – was banned to under-18s "as the film showed a half-naked woman dancing suggestively in a manner that could be harmful to minors". Even in 1974 – by then female nudity was commonly seen in the media – *Rivista settimanale - Le ore* was banned for under-14s due to content deemed erotic.

So even with regards to films advertising products, the criteria adopted by the revision commissions did not waver. The majority of constraints were imposed on erotic content, with a few executed for political reasons or because of, according to art. 3, clause D of the Regulation, "repulsive cruelties, [...] and surgical operations".

It is necessary to point out that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish genuine documentaries from adverts, because often the latter were disguised as the former, or because documentaries sometimes included advertising material. A typical example of a film falling into both categories is the 1961 documentary *Lacco Ameno - Incantesimo d'Ischia*. Produced by Cineriz, owned by Angelo Rizzoli, a major promoter of tourism on the island of Ischia from the 1950s, the film boasted a first-rate cast, being directed by Guido Guerrasio, Technicolor photography by Giulio Gianini, music by Gino Marinuzzi jr. and narrated by Arnaldo Foà. A film advertising baths and spas will inevitably show some scantily clad bodies; naturally, all the better if they belong to pretty young women. Which is what *Lacco Ameno* did, but in a discreet manner: Rizzoli certainly wouldn't have wanted to run unnecessary risks. But all in vain. On 13 May 1961, the ever-watchful commission censored all the frames in which a female patient was being massaged, face-up; the same fate awaited the frames in which a female patient was in the shower, covering her breasts with her hands, in accordance with art. 3, clause A of the Regulation, an adjunct of Royal Decree no.3287 of 23 September 1923, as the scenes were "offensive to common decency and morality".

There was also a vast territory in which advertising material relating to current affairs programmes was censored. As we have seen, art. 12 of law 958/49 did not allow them to contain advertising. Often newsreels attempted to insert product placement, but the revision commissions were, in general, very strict about such things. As previously mentioned, 15 percent of the cuts made to current affairs programmes were for this reason. Some examples? *Ieri oggi domani* n. 220 – as declared on 5 July 1963, by its editor Gualtiero Jacopetti – was required to cut the scene in which a truck bearing the Cinzano logo happened to be passing. On 10 January 1964, Raoul Bertini Frassoni, the marketing manager of *Incom*, announced that 11 metres of film showing a close-up of publicity writing had been cut from *Cronache del mondo* n. 414.

On 12 May 19, the head of Jadas Film declared that “a total of 4 and a half metres of film was cut in which, in the background, an aeroplane could be seen with the B.O.A.C. logo on it”.

To conclude, despite being a “minor” cinematographic field, newsreels and adverts were an integral part of the visual culture of Italians for fifteen years, between 1946 and 1962, a period when going to the cinema was around ten times as popular as it is today, when the era of TV had not yet been born, or was in its embryonic stage. This explains the influence that cannot be overlooked that they had on culture and the aspirations of the Italian population of the time and the why the censorship commissions came down so hard on genuine or presumed violations.

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