

## CHAPTER 4

# Establishment of the Norwegian Public Relations Club in the Context of the Cold War

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**Abstract:** The Norwegian Public Relations Club was established as a kind of independent think tank for the Norwegian state in order to control, discuss and define public relations in Norway after the Second World War. Many of the central actors in the organization had backgrounds from Norwegian propaganda work during World War II, and the PR Club's early work can be linked to the international situation after World War II, with the start of the Cold War. This significantly influenced their views on PR, which they wanted to distinguish from what was perceived as propaganda and false (fake) information. PR was supposed to be a tool for the free world – against authoritarian communism. The establishment of the Norwegian Public Relations Club was strongly inspired by a corresponding British association, but from the start, the Norwegian association was more directly geared towards the international situation and Cold War propaganda.

**Keywords:** Norwegian Communications Association, Norwegian Public Relations Club, PR history, propaganda, Cold War, Scandinavian propaganda model

## Introduction

This chapter investigates the establishment of the *Norwegian Public Relations Club*, the forerunner of the *Norwegian Communication Association*, NCA. Today, NCA is the dominant organization for those working with strategic communication in Norway, with around 4,000 members. According to their website, it is “a professional community for those who work with or educate themselves in the field of communication”<sup>1</sup> The Association was founded in 1949, as the *Norwegian Public Relations Club* (*Den Norske Public Relations Klubb*). It changed its name to the *Norwegian Public Relations Association* (*Norsk Public Relations Forening*) in 1972, and to the *Norwegian Communication Association* in 2000.

This chapter explains why the Club was established and what role the Club had in the first decade after it was established. The chapter addresses the following research questions:

- What was the purpose (objective/intention) of the Norwegian Public Relations Club?
- What role did the Club’s members intend to play?
- What role did the Club have in the early years (1949–1960)?

In order to answer these research questions, the establishment of the Club is analyzed in the context of the political and historical situation, characterized by Cold War propaganda and the reconstruction of Norway after World War II.

## Methods

The *Norwegian Communications Association* has an extensive private archive of documents dating back to 1949, just before it was established officially. There are minutes from official meetings, copies of applications for membership, updated membership lists, statutes and drafts, and incoming letters. In addition, there is some information available in the Archives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has been handed over to the *National Archives*.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the public debate

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1 <https://www.kommunikasjon.no/>

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1945–1957): Information Office, London, RA/S-2057/2/D/Db/L0022.

on public relations from 1949 to 1960 in *Journalisten* and *Dagspressen* is reviewed and analyzed. *Dagspressen* was the newspaper of the *Norwegian Newspapers Association*. *Journalisten* was published by the *Norwegian Press Association*. All of these documents have been analyzed with the aim of finding out 1) who was involved in the Club's work, 2) what topics were discussed, 3) how did the members understand public relations, 4) where did this understanding come from? The discussion is set in a political and communications historical context, both nationally and internationally, where the backgrounds of the people involved are given particular scrutiny. Furthermore, changes in the way the Club functioned during the 1950s is carefully examined.

The history of the Club has not previously been scientifically investigated. Until today, we have relied on an anniversary outlet (Mørk, 1994) to understand the development and role of the *Norwegian Public Relations Club*, without putting it in the context of the public debate, or social developments. In order to understand how propaganda or intentional communication was perceived at the time, we will first take a look at the rise of propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Propaganda in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

With the development of mass society and the conflict between the great powers at the beginning of the 20th century, political leaders were forced for the first time in history to draw on the collective power of individuals' enthusiasm to defend the nation (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 209). They discovered that the masses could be manipulated, and that war propaganda could mobilize the masses with patriotic and ethnic nationalism. The masses were to be mobilized for a total war that involved both private homes and the masses as shapers of a nationalist policy that had not been seen before (Stråth & Wagner, 2017, p. 160).

The British government pioneered this form of propaganda, and other European leaders soon learned that PR practitioners and politicians could create news that was then disseminated by journalists (Kunczik, 2014, p. 102). In the conflict with the IRA in the 1920s, it was the British tactic to spread lies and half-truths that seemed like truths, which they called "propaganda by news" (quoted from Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 16). It was claimed that the routine news production gave them a grip on the press and that journalists took their version of reality as fact. The director of *Public Information*

at *Dublin Castle*, Basil Clarke, stressed that it “must look true and it must look complete and candid or its ‘credit’ is gone”, and claimed that journalists believed everything he had to say about the conflict (Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 16). British propaganda was also commented on in the Norwegian Parliament, when the chairman of NTB, C. J. Hambro (Conservative), on 5 November 1923 pointed out that the British Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, sent messages to Norwegian media about Irish conditions, “which were not based on any reality”.<sup>3</sup> Britain continued to develop its propaganda machine into the Second World War, also inspiring Hitler’s propaganda (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2019, pp. 200–201).

During World War II, the British Ministry of Information managed to convince its government that the truth was the best means of fighting totalitarianism, even if the whole truth was not revealed to the public. This emphasis on truth became the basic philosophy for the BBC, and proved to be an extremely powerful propaganda weapon, especially toward German civilians towards the end of the war, but also to mobilize efforts at home (Jowett & O’Donnell 2019, p. 234). This British “Strategy of Truth” also became a model for American propaganda during the Second World War, relying on facts to ensure credibility (Bull, 2008, p. 14).

Norway was not involved in the hostilities during World War I and therefore did not have the same need to mobilize the population. In connection with the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905, however, some unofficial communication work was organized to influence the European powers. A secret press office in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was also established from 1909 to 1911 (Dahlen, 2017). From 1919 to 1940, the MFA had an open press office, which tried to influence the Norwegian and foreign press (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022A).

In the 1930s, the political propaganda of the Norwegian Labour Party was strongly inspired by the Nazis, as well as Russian propaganda. Russian-born Social Democrat Sergej Tschachotin, who claimed that the Social Democrats in Germany had to fight the Nazis with their own propaganda methods, was particularly influential (Bang, 2013a, 2013b; Jensen, 2002). Finn Moe, editor of the Norwegian labour journal *Det 20de århundre* quoted Tschachotin, arguing that the fight against fascism “was primarily a psychological fight, a *propaganda fight*” (own translation, Moe, 1934, p. 1).

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3 Parliamentary proceedings (1923). *Stortingstidende* 1923, November 5. Norwegian Parliament. Kristiania, pp. 3266–3267.

Moe was also a journalist for the government's mouthpiece, *Arbeiderbladet*, before the Second World War, a press consultant for the Norwegian government during the war, and a parliamentary representative for the Labour Party from 1950.

With the Nazi occupation of Norway in April 1940, the Norwegian government went into exile in London, and Norwegian journalists were almost forced into the state's information activities, as they could no longer conduct normal journalistic activities in Norway. In close cooperation with representatives from the Norwegian government and press, Norwegian information activities were organized in London, the USA and Stockholm.

The MFA press office became a separate information office for the Norwegian government in London (Sverdrup, 1996, p. 236). It disseminated information over *BBC radio networks* to Norwegians in Norway about allied warfare, as well as information from the exile authorities and the resistance movement (Lange, 1998, p. 111). At the Norwegian legation in Washington, a larger press office was established, with a separate branch in New York (Sverdrup, 1996, p. 240). In Stockholm, a press office was established at the Norwegian legation, where many Norwegian journalists contributed. This activity was conducted to counter Nazi propaganda in Norway and other countries – and to mobilize resistance against the Nazi occupation.

While the tone of both Nazi propaganda and Labour Party propaganda before the war was loud and accusatory, a more subdued and calm communication style was established during the war. The first BBC radio speech from London to the Norwegian people by King Haakon on 8 July 1940 was delivered in a calm and balanced tone (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005, p. 456). His speech was followed up with factual and sober information about the events of the war to occupied Norway (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005, p. 470), inspired by the BBC and carefully monitored by the British authorities. This radio broadcast stood in stark contrast to speeches and posters used during the German occupation of Norway, especially the Nazi-collaborator Vidkun Quisling's condemnatory and rather aggressive style of communication.

The organization of the Norwegian propaganda work was comprehensive towards the end of World War II, at a time when the Norwegian Resistant Movement benefited greatly from the information they received and could send out. However, in October 1944, the leadership of the

Home Front sent a letter to Prime Minister Johan Nygårdvold (Labour) in London, warning against continuing state information activities after the transition period, activities which would be reminiscent of Nazi propaganda:

Based on the guiding principle that free speech must first and foremost be secured, one should be on guard against anything that might resemble state intervention and state regulation of press relations. The suggestion of a continued state information service beyond the actual transition period has therefore not won any support. There is concern that such activity may, after all, be reminiscent of the propaganda activity of the state authorities during the occupation, of which we had more than enough of during this period. (own translation, quoted from Aas, 1980, pp. 184–185)

It seems that such concerns gained greater importance for Norwegian information activities after the Second World War and into the Cold War, but perhaps not in the way intended in this specific entreaty.

## The start of the Cold War

After five years of German occupation, it was time to rebuild both the economy and democracy in Norway in 1945. It was time for peace and reconciliation. In the first coalition government after the war, all the political parties were involved, including the communists. However, cracks quickly appeared in this idyll, which affected political communication in Norway for years to come, including the Norwegian Public Relations Club.

On 4 April 1949, the USA joined forces with Norway, among others, to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1955, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact, in cooperation with seven Eastern European countries all ruled by some kind of communist dictatorship. The tense international situation after the Second World War increased the interest in using propaganda and counterpropaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The Cold War triggered the use of psychological warfare, amounting to ideological war in peacetime as well as in times without direct military conflicts (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 195).

The Soviet Union created and financed so-called *front groups* in Norway and other Western countries, which were supposed to look like civilian peace groups (Engberg, 1995; Rowe, 2002; Styles, 2017). Also called *astro-turfs* (fake grassroots organizations), these groups wished to hide who was

really behind the messages communicated, and as such they functioned as a form of black propaganda (Cull et al., 2003, p. 324; Jowett & O'Donnell 2019, p. 18).

In black propaganda, the sources are concealed or credited to a false authority and contain lies, fabrications and/or deceptions. By contrast, white propaganda comes from an identifiable source, and the information tends to be accurate, even when it intends to convince an audience of the superiority and justice of a particular regime or ideology. Grey propaganda lies between white and black propaganda, where the source may (or may not) be correctly identified, and the accuracy of some of the information may be uncertain (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, pp. 17–31).

The counterpart to Soviet propaganda in Europe was primarily the *Atlantic Pact's Information and Propaganda Organization – Information Service* – with offices in Paris. Systematic and in-depth analyses of communist propaganda activities in separate western countries were used to strengthen support of the national government's countermeasures. The Americans feared the effect of Soviet propaganda, but at the same time understood that direct American propaganda aimed at European citizens could be counterproductive (Risso, 2007, 2009, 2011). Therefore, the US primarily focused on a propaganda strategy that involved supporting locally produced counter-propaganda. Contacts and friendships with local journalists and collaborators formed part of the American strategy. *The Office of War Information* established itself in Oslo as early as 9 May 1945, and began early on to invite journalists from the Norwegian press to the USA, in collaboration with the *State Information Office* and the Norwegian Press Association (Danielsen, 2019; Ottosen, 1996, p. 281).

## **The organization of Norwegian propaganda**

During the transition period, when Norwegian democracy was to be reinstated, the Government Information Office in London was transferred to Oslo and renamed the *State Information Office*. Tor Gjesdal continued as leader, and many journalists from the *Press Office* in Stockholm also contributed (Aas, 1980, pp. 194, 200). Later the State Information Office was relocated back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a departmental press office, where it was before the war (Skjeseth, 2018, p. 162). On 31 August 1945, the Government established the *Information Committee for Reconstruction*. The Committee made short films, broadcasts for the Norwegian National

Broadcaster, and arranged conferences on the reconstruction work in Northern Norway.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the Home Front's warnings, other permanent institutions for communication were also established. In line with the entreaty from the Home Front, the work of these institutions was not called propaganda, PR, or any other form of influence, but presented under the guise of other activities. *Norsk Filmrevy* (known as *Filmavisen*) produced films from 21 May 1945 that legitimized the legal purge and democracy, and promoted the moral reconstruction of the country. This was a continuation of *Filmavisen*, which had shown Nazi propaganda in cinemas during the war. Now the films showed that the legal purge was just, and that the population had a moral duty to re-build the country, while at the same time highlighting Nazi barbarism and the heroism of the resistance movement. *Norsk Filmrevy* continued until 1963 (Flo, 2016).

When the Information Committee for Reconstruction was dismantled in 1947, the Prime Minister's Office restored the position of press chief. Olaf Solumsmoen now became one of Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen's closest advisers<sup>5</sup> (Garvik, 2022) and was a central figure in the development of the Norwegian propaganda apparatus, including his work as deputy chairman of the Norwegian Public Relations Club (more discussion below).

Past experiences with a lack of information and delayed resistance mobilization during the German attack in 1940 influenced the new information initiatives. In 1950, a committee was appointed, chaired by Solumsmoen, to plan how an information service in war could be organized. A committee was also appointed to discuss psychological defence preparedness. This committee was chaired by *Aftenposten's* editor-in-chief Einar Diesen, and their recommendation was presented in 1954. Based on the work of these committees, the *Emergency Preparedness Committee for the State Information Service in War* was established in 1956, headed by Solumsmoen (Sørli & Rønne, 2006).

There were many on the political left in Norway who were against NATO membership and closer Western affiliation (Danielsen, 2019; Olstad 2021, p. 78). Support for NATO membership among the bourgeois parties and their voters was much greater (Galtung, 1993). Thus, the most

4 <http://finnmarksarkivene.no/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Arkivkatalog-Trond-Danckes-privatarkiv.pdf>

5 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/smk/ansvarsmrader/forloperne/1946--nyere-tid/1948-Statsministeren-far-pressesjef/id759089/>



important target group for the new line of defence was those who were sceptical within the labour movement. The bourgeois parties left “it to the Labour Party to settle scores with the left-wing and the communists” (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b, p. 173). At the initiative of Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen (Labour), the organization *People and Defence (Folk og Forsvar)* was established in 1951, after Norway joined NATO in 1949. Gerhardsen was one of the members of the working committee for the establishment of the organization, and Solumsmoen was present at the last planning meeting of the working committee in December 1950 (Nordahl, 1991, p. 47). The organization appeared to be an umbrella organization for various civil organizations (trade unions, political youth organizations and other independent organizations), but was supported and worked in close cooperation with the Norwegian authorities and NATO’s information service in Paris. The aim of the organization was to promote Norwegian defence policy and NATO membership (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b).

In 1955, the *Norwegian Atlantic Committee (Den norske Atlanterhavskomite)* was established, with a more elitist character. Whereas People and Defence targeted local and regional newspapers, national newspapers were more important to the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, as well as researchers and teachers in schools. Like People and Defence, the Norwegian Atlantic Committee also presented itself as a civilian organization, but was supported financially by the government and loyally supported the government’s defence policy. Both organizations had a clear anti-communist and anti-Soviet message and cooperated closely with and were supported by a united Norwegian press, with the exception of the communist press. Appearing as civilian NGOs, they functioned as information agencies for the government, conducting grey propaganda, where sources of information were often hidden and delivered by civil organizations, in a sort of *Scandinavian propaganda model* (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b). At the same time, a PR association was established in Norway, which was strongly inspired by the corresponding British *Institute of Public Relations* (IPR).

## The British Institute of Public Relations

The Institute of Public Relations – IPR was formally established in Britain in February 1948. The initiators of the Institute were a group of local public employees, but they quickly invited in PR people who worked in

other industries, including private businesses (L'Etang, 2009, p. 63). The aim of the Institute was to raise the professional standard and status of “this comparatively new profession” (Rogers, 1958, quoted from L'Etang 2009, p. 63).

Early on, IPR defined public relations in terms of an ideological Cold War framework, where PR was seen as a tool for promoting the right ideas. PR was presented as a source of morally good ideas and a technique that could combat totalitarianism in general and communism in particular:

[Public relations] is a group of crusaders whose job is to carry the torch of understanding into areas where discord and dissension may be eliminated by information and explanation. (Lipscombe, 1953, p. 1, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 63)

It was pointed out that public relations should be for the good of society: “If we are not concerned that we are benefiting humanity, we are wasting our time” (Norman Rogers, honorary IPR secretary, 1951–1954, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 73). The fight for the truth was therefore highlighted as an important concept in public relations, in contrast to communist propaganda. Public relations was presented as a source of morally sound ideas, an approach that stood in opposition to both totalitarianism and anarchy in the nascent Cold War. In this way, knowledge of the democratic principles was seen as the most potent defence against communism “and a powerful weapon in the ‘cold war’” (General Sir R. Adam, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 69).

There was also a desire to define and formalize PR as a profession. The new association was supposed to be a channel for ideas and a lobbying body and opinion leader on behalf of the members to raise the status of communication workers in society. A provisional definition was established in May 1947:

Public relations means the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain, by conveying information and by all other suitable means, mutual understanding and good relations between a firm, undertaking statutory authority, government, department, profession or other body or group, and the community at large. (Rogers, 1973, p. 12, quoted from L'Etang, 2009, p. 65)

From the start, IPR actively organized outward-oriented activities, including their own journal *Public Relations*, which was published four times a year from September 1948. They arranged courses and seminars on design,

news values, journalistic practice, production of films and planning exhibitions from the first year (L'Etang, 2009, pp. 65–67).

Restrictions applied to IPR membership in order to maintain the status of the organization, with a restriction on those who were labelled “charlatans” (quoted from L'Etang, 2009, p. 75). Those employed by press agencies, for example, were denied access to IPR. Those who applied for membership, had to show that their work had a broader grounding (L'Etang, 2009, p. 75).

## The Norwegian Public Relations Club

Six months after Norway joined NATO, the Norwegian Public Relations Club held its constituent meeting on 26 October 1949, with nine male and one female members, all of whom held senior positions in society. The new head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' press office, Hans Olav, was elected head of the new association. He had led Norwegian information activities in the US during the war and continued as press advisor at the Norwegian Embassy, until he took over as head of the Press Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1948. According to the Club's anniversary journal, his stay in the USA had given him “considerable experience in the field and made many valuable contacts”.<sup>6</sup> The Prime Minister's close associate, Olaf Solumsmoen, was elected deputy chairman. In addition to the government employees, there were representatives from the *Norwegian Airline* (part of the *Scandinavian Airline System*), the *Norwegian Shipowners' Association* and the *Oslo Tourist Board* (*Reisetrafikkforeningen for Oslo og omegn*), all of whom were closely connected to the Norwegian government during and after the war.

Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen was invited to the first meeting on 21 December 1949. According to the minutes, they had a confidential conversation, which lasted almost two hours about the state budget, fiscal policy, Scandinavian cooperation, and the Norwegian defence situation.<sup>7</sup> Gerhardsen was especially concerned about defence issues and the communist threat. On 29 February 1948, he gave a speech to local party members, which received considerable attention in the Norwegian press. Gerhardsen characterized Norwegian communists as a threat to the rule

6 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1959): Den Norske Public Relations Klubb, 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 37; <http://runeberg.org/hvemerhvem/1948/0403.html>

7 Odd Medbøe (1949): Minutes from a meeting, 21 December 1949, KA.

of law, democracy, and Norwegian independence (Gerhardsen, 2005[1948], pp. 485–486). The first full year of the PR Club’s program shows that the organization was focused on the Cold War and the new security situation, with topics such as “Military Research”, “The Foreign Situation”, “The Broadcasting’s Foreign Programmes” and “Marshall Aid”.<sup>8</sup> At a meeting on 3 March 1950, Foreign Minister Halvard Lange gave a detailed briefing on the foreign policy situation and Norway’s position.<sup>9</sup> The Prime Minister also attended meetings of the Norwegian Public Relations Club in 1950.<sup>10</sup>

In the Club statutes, the emphasis from the start was on the role the Club should have in society. The organization was to be *a guide for society* and serve *the interests of society*. The Club’s first press release stated that public relations is aimed both externally to society and internally to the people who work with tasks of social importance.<sup>11</sup> The Club was supposed to be a non-political organization whose purpose was to promote the quality and ethics of the profession.<sup>12</sup> The definition of PR was almost directly transmitted/translated from the one used by the British Institute of Public Relations, even if it was a bit shorter and it didn’t include relations.<sup>13,14</sup>

The Secretary of the Club, Odd Medbøe, who worked for the Norwegian Airline, emphasized that public relations had an important role in preserving democracy, and could correct the press. According to Medbøe, it could be difficult for the press to maintain a full overview over matters, and that the public relations worker’s most important task was to assist the press, so that the journalists could have the best possible and broadest possible basis to carry out their work.<sup>15</sup> This representative from the state-owned airline company actually believed that PR workers had to help the press in order for the press to provide correct information, similar to the functioning of both People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee in relation to defence policy issues (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b).

Even before the constituent meeting of the PR Club, there was close contact with the corresponding British organization. In the summer of

8 Odd Medbøe (1950): Minutes from a meeting 18 January 1950, KA.

9 Odd Medbøe (1950): Minutes from a meeting 3. March 1950, KA.

10 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

11 Journalisten (November 1949): “PR-klubben”.

12 The Norwegian Public Relation Club (1949): “Lover” (§2) (26.10.1949), KA.

13 Tresselt, Egil (1950): «Public Relations», *Bedrifts-økonomen*, May 1950, KA, p. 119.

14 “Public Relations is a meticulous, factual, planned and sustained method of using information and other means to establish and maintain mutual understanding between one or more people or organizations in society as a whole” (own translation).

15 Odd Medbøe (1951): «Hva er public relations», *Morgenposten* (10.05.1951).

1949, Medbøe became a “corresponding member” of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), and he participated as an observer at their annual meeting later that year. Medbøe also received statutes and other documents from IPR when he and Oddvar Aas from the Foreign Ministry’s press service were tasked with preparing statutes for the Norwegian PR Club. Aas was assistant press attaché in Stockholm during the war. On 3 August 1949, E. Lindsay Shankland from IPR came to Norway to meet Medbøe and four others who were founding members of the Norwegian organization. Shankland was also a guest at a meeting of the Norwegian PR Club in 1950, where he was thanked for the assistance he had provided in the formation of the Norwegian association.<sup>16</sup> Thus, representatives from the Norwegian PR Club gained good insight into ongoing discussions on PR in England and, according to the anniversary journal, this led to a lot of useful information being obtained.<sup>17</sup>

In 1950, Medbøe wrote to board member Herman Kristoffer Lemkuhl in London that the main idea of the PR Club was “to keep the new profession, Public Relations, under sound control in this country”.<sup>18</sup> Medbøe points out that there is growing interest in the field in Norway, and that it is therefore important that “our profession is not misused by anyone”.<sup>19</sup> This can be linked to an understanding that PR should only be used for the purpose of good, and not be abused by enemies of the state, or those who worked in commercial enterprises, who were still not welcome as members of the Norwegian PR Club. Voting on membership in the Club was kept secret and many applications were rejected in the early years (Mørk, 1994, p. 9). However, after the government invited the trade organizations into People and Defence, and thus the fight against communist influence and for Norwegian defence policy, members of the trade organizations were admitted to the PR Club for the first time in 1951.<sup>20</sup>

Compared with the Norwegian association, the British Institute of Public Relations was much more open concerning who could join. According to board member Odd Hjort-Sørensen, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’

16 Odd Medbø (1950): Minutes from a meeting 3. March 1950, KA.

17 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1959): Den Norske Public Relation Klubb. 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 37.

18 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

19 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

20 Odd Medbøe (1952): Annual Report for Public Relations Klubb 1951–52 (02.12.1952), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

press service, it was noted at the IPR annual meeting in 1949 by the association's secretary Alec Spoor that the Norwegians "had chosen a more correct line than the English in the matter of membership". Spoor said that he "regretted that it was a bit difficult to find a common ground for the work in the institute whose members represent widely different interests and often also competing companies".<sup>21</sup>

The Norwegian Club did not arrange practical courses in communication or publish their own magazine, as did their British counterparts. However, the members of the board wrote articles on PR in newspapers and magazines and conducted a series of lectures for political science students at the University of Oslo. The new chairman, Odd Medbøe, held lectures on public relations in 1956,<sup>22</sup> and several of the Club's members were invited back to give more lectures the following year. Medbøe held lectures entitled, for example, "General Introduction to Public Relations", and Finn Jerstad lectured on "Public Relations teaching at the American universities" after he had been on a study tour in the country.<sup>23</sup> All these lectures took place at the workplaces of the lecturers and did not become part of the official university teaching programme.<sup>24</sup>

Former head of the government's information office in London, now head of the UN information office, Tor Gjesdal, visited the Norwegian PR Club in 1954. At this meeting, Gjesdal said that the UN statutes stated that their information office should not engage in propaganda. At the same time, he claimed that PR was close to propaganda. It was all a matter of whether they were *meeting certain needs* or *conducting true propaganda*. Gjesdal therefore believed that PR was a good hiding or blurring concept, and that by practicing it, they were getting close to conducting an activity that they were prohibited from doing. Gjesdal's goal in this regard was to create an understanding of the ideas and work of the UN. Gjesdal also informed the Club members that the Russian UN representatives voted consistently against the budget of the UN Committee on Information.<sup>25</sup>

21 Hjort-Sørensen, Odd (1949): "Rapport fra The British Institute of Public Relations' årsmøte oktober 1949", KA.

22 Den norske public relations klubb (1956): "Styrets årsberetning for 1956", KA.

23 Den norske public relations klubb (1957): "Generalforsamling i Den norske public relations klubb". (29.05.1957), KA.

24 Den norske public relations klubb (1959): Den norske public relations klubb. 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 36.

25 Minutes, 06.01.1954, KA.

Secretary of the Norwegian PR Association, Odd Medbøe also played a central role in the organizing committee of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), along with representatives from NATO countries Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. Together with Hans Hermans (advisor to the Dutch Prime Minister), Medbøe prepared the statutes of IPRA, was elected vice-president of the Provisional Committee<sup>26</sup> and chaired the first official meetings. IPRA was established in 1955 and included members from the United States, Belgium, Canada and Finland. The preparatory meetings and first IPRA meeting took place in Great Britain in June 1955.<sup>27</sup> From the beginning, the association had a clear Anglo-Saxon and Western European profile (L'Etang, 2009, pp. 76–78).

Medbøe was also invited to the annual meeting of the *Public Relations Society of America* in the late 1950s, as vice chairman of the International Public Relations Committee. There was a mix of people from the public sector and large business enterprises in attendance, but as Medbøe pointed out in an internal memo, Cold War issues were also discussed: Deputy Secretary of State Edward W. Barret talked about measures such as “Propagandizing for Democracy” and “Voice of America”, which apparently had altruistic motives, but the information was ideologically injected to shape positive perceptions about the United States and its allies and to create positive attitudes toward democracy, capitalism and freedom (Jowett & O'Donnell 2019, pp. 12–13), similar to the way People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee functioned in Norway. In a speech to the American Public Relations Association, Medbøe highlights the importance of the organization for the development of IPRA:

We have always looked to you in the United States and admired your advanced development in this important field. I am happy to tell you that some of your fine members have been wholeheartedly in our discussion from the very beginning and contributed tremendously to the success of our work. In my opinion it would not have been possible to launch the international association without the support it had from the United States.<sup>28</sup>

26 Provisional Committee for the Establishment of an International Public Relations Association – Minutes of Meetings, London, May 8, and Hastings, May 9, 1953 (1953), Bournemouth University Weston Library

27 Minutes of the first meeting of the Council of the International P.R. Association, Bath, England, 1 May (1955); Minutes of the Second meeting of the Council of the International P.R. Association, The Hague, Holland, 14 October (1955); Minutes of the Third meeting of the Council of the International Public Relations Association, Paris, France, May 31–June 2, 1956 (1956).

28 Odd Medbøe (1955): “Odd Meboe address”, KA.



Medbøe also said that PR can create better “understanding between nations”, and that: “Surely there is much we can do to develop warm cooperation amongst the people of the world”.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, this is the same year that the CIA supported a military coup in Guatemala, after Edward Bernays had worked for several years on a campaign on behalf of the *United Fruit Company*, to smear the legitimately elected Guatemalan president (Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 22). This kind of propaganda is reminiscent of Britain’s activities during the First World War.

In the Norwegian discussions over statutes in 1956, it came to light that some people were talking about creating their own PR Association, if they continued to be banned from the Norwegian PR Club.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the paragraph that excluded certain branches was removed, but voting on members still took place by secret ballots.<sup>31</sup> In 1957, Lars Øystein Os from the *Information Office for Insurance* was admitted to the Club. Thus, formal ties were established for the first time with the Norwegian trade organization press and the private sector. In 1954, representatives from the *Norwegian Association of Trade Unions Insurance and Information* and the *Norwegian Cooperative Association* were also accepted into the organization.<sup>32</sup> In 1957, two PR managers for foreign oil companies in Norway were admitted: Bjørn Hafslund from *Esso, Norway* and Chris Bugge from *Shell, Norway*.<sup>33</sup> In 1960, PR agency leader and owner Nils Magne Apeland’s application for membership was granted,<sup>34</sup> the same year he published the first book in Norwegian on PR (Apeland, 1960). Gradually, more representatives from the Norwegian business community joined the organization. As the Norwegian Public Relations Club opened up to more and more members from the private sector, the organization moved into a new era, which is not within the scope of the investigations in this article.

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29 Odd Medbøe (1955): “Odd Mebboe adress”, KA.

30 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1954): Summer meeting on 15 June 1956 (18.06.1956), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

31 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1956): Directors’ annual report for 1956, KA.

32 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1954): Minutes of meeting (17.09.1954), KA.

33 Finn Jerstad (1957): “Ekstraordinær generalforsamling 29 november 1957”; Den norske public relations klubb (1957): Letter to “PR sjef Bjørn Hafslund” (30.11.1957), KA.

34 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1960): The General Assembly of the Norwegian Public Relations Club was held at the SAS House in Oslo on Tuesday, April 5, 1960, KA.



## A think tank for Cold War propaganda

We have seen that there are clear threads between British war propaganda, the British Institute of Public Relations and the Norwegian Public Relations Club. Several of the early members of the Club had backgrounds from the government's information office in London during World War II, and from the outset, there was extensive contact between the two countries' associations.

The Norwegian PR Club was significantly inspired by British and US communication work. The first leader of the organization had experience from information work in the USA throughout the Second World War. Moreover, the press manager of the state-owned Norwegian Airline had close contacts with the British Institute of Public Relations (IPR) and the International PR Association.

We have also seen that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was established after Norway joined NATO, and that NATO membership became part of the Club's internal discussions, which was also a focus of the government's information work, not least through People and Defence and the work of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee. The PR Club was originally only open for people who represented official Norway, mainly people who worked on foreign policy and other types of international contacts, such as the Norwegian Airline, the Norwegian Shipowners' Association and the Oslo Tourist Board, which worked closely with the official authorities. The available documents show that the discussions at the PR Club's meetings were about Norway's relations with other countries and foreign policy. There were also close (personal) ties to those who organized the pro-NATO and anti-communist propaganda in People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee.

Neither the Norwegian Public Relations Club, People and Defence or the Norwegian Atlantic Committee used the term propaganda in their documents or in external work. After the British use of propaganda during World War I and Nazi Germany during World War II, the term propaganda was clearly discredited. Propaganda was used to unite European nations, which increased tensions in Europe, leading to a violent mobilization in World War I, and was later exploited by Hitler to mobilize around the Nazi movement and to expand the German nation in World War II (Stråth & Wagner, 2017, p. 47). The Norwegian Home Front also warned against government information work that would remind people of Nazi propaganda.

The Norwegian Prime Minister and his colleagues therefore had a need to develop other forms of communication, which would not be reminiscent of the propaganda of the Nazis, the new enemy, the communists, or the propaganda from the Soviet Union. This new form of propaganda was therefore more subdued, indirect, and subtle.

Thus, we can conclude that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was initially a part of what Dahlen and Werenskjold (2022b) call a Scandinavian propaganda model, where social democratic politicians use the media and civil society to gain support for defence policy and combat Soviet propaganda and communist influence (p. 174), a propaganda model that has many similarities to Soviet attempts to influence and support civil peace organizations in Scandinavia in the 1950s and 1960s.

Based on the discussion in this chapter, we have seen that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was originally a kind of think tank (“a safe place where plans and strategies could be discussed”<sup>35</sup>) for communication workers in the public sector. We have seen that the initiative to establish the Club, preparation of its statutes and its management were dominated by Labour Party people who held central positions in the state apparatus. The Prime Minister himself was present at the first meeting, and his close ally Olaf Solumsmoen was elected deputy chairman.

The Norwegian Public Relations Club was nevertheless an organization that was formed outside the state apparatus, as part of civil society, and could therefore include close allies from the Norwegian Airline, the Norwegian Shipowners’ Association and the Oslo Tourist Board, who would support the state’s goals and intentions, in line with the Scandinavian propaganda model.

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35 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/think-tank>

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