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## A Statistical Latecomer: Dutch Industry in Figures

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## **A Statistical Latecomer: Dutch Industry in Figures**

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### **Profile**

Jacques van Gerwen (born 1956), studied economic and social history at the University of Utrecht from 1975-1982. Became senior researcher at the Nederlandsch Economisch Historisch Archief (NEHA) and since 2005 at the IISH. Since 1993 Member of the Editorial Board of *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* and one of the predecessors the *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*. Since 2002 Staff Member of the Researchgroup *Bedrijfsleven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw (BINT)* (The Dutch Business System in the twentieth century: [www.bintproject.nl](http://www.bintproject.nl)). He is also the composer of a database on Dutch entrepreneurs.

Main interest: economic history of the Netherlands (1800-2000), business history, entrepreneurial history and biographies of leading Dutch businesspeople. See also <http://www.iisg.nl/staff/jge.html>.

## **A Statistical Latecomer: Dutch Industry in Figures**

Jacques van Gerwen

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### **Summary**

As early as the nineteenth century, collecting information through corporate censuses provided many Western nations with good statistical insight into the structure of their industry, and enabled both policymakers and scientists to use information from these censuses. In the Netherlands the first corporate census would only take place much later, in 1930. Before 1930, a large diversity of statistical materials had been collected by various organizations and (government) departments, which did provide partial insights into some aspects of Dutch industry. In this article we contend that, in addition to practical obstructions (organizational, time and money), the liberal climate in the Netherlands formed an important barrier to any breakthrough to a *statistical mind* on the part of government and corporate industry.

### **Introduction**

In 1912 Professor H. Blink, Associate Professor at the State University in Leiden, noted: ‘Our industrial statistics are in such a state that they do not exist at all. [...] Anyone who wants to learn something about industry remains totally abashed and must make do with indirect, very incomplete data.’<sup>1</sup> That troubled him even more because in the nineteenth century a large number of Western nations had already developed a tradition pertaining to collecting statistical material about their industries. These included Austria (1841), Belgium (1846), France (1845), Norway and Sweden (in the first half of the nineteenth century), the U.S. (1850), Germany (1875), Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Denmark (1897) and Hungary. From this it can be deduced that in these countries the idea had penetrated early on that obtaining dependable statistical data was necessary in order to correctly judge economic, social, and scientific questions.

Only many years later, in 1930, did a corporate census allow the first statistical data about the complete structure of Dutch industry to become available. In addition to information about industry, the census also included information about other economic sectors, except for agriculture. Blink (1852-1931) was able to see this come about. He died one year later. But the published results of the first corporate census only became available five years later, from 1935.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blink, ‘De Nederlandsche Statistiek in het bijzonder de economische statistiek’.

<sup>2</sup> *Bedrijfstelling 31 December 1930*.

Several questions are central in this contribution about Dutch industry in figures.<sup>3</sup> First, there is the question of what it was like before 1930 with respect to collecting statistical data about Dutch industry. In this regard we shall differentiate between: statistical data on employment, statistical data about the economic indications expressed in production, use, and added value and statistical data about the structure of industry expressed in numbers and types of enterprises. Second, is 1930 a year in which there was a clear caesura in the history of statistics for Dutch industry and for Dutch corporate industry in general? And finally, given the relatively late date at which the first corporate census took place in the Netherlands (late from an international perspective), the question also naturally arises of why it took until 1930 to happen. What factors and conditions formed a barrier to the development of a *statistical mind* in government and corporate industry regarding statistical data about Dutch industry?<sup>4</sup>

### **‘Most neglected and mistreated’**

In 1912 Professor H. Blink suggested in various publications that economic knowledge about the Netherlands was generally ‘most neglected and mistreated’ in the existing literature.<sup>5</sup> He believed this limited knowledge was the consequence of a lack of good official data. Indeed, he did not mince words about the issue of where the blame lay. The government was the principal offender in this regard. Blink fulminated that the government ‘had already neglected its responsibilities for a century in not working seriously towards acquiring complete knowledge about our country and people and its economic situations, its work and aims, or to bring together the data about this knowledge in a reliable way. The latter is especially true for statistics about trade, industry, and traffic. In part, such statistics are completely absent, and where they do exist, they are so undependable that they make us appear laughable to anyone who studies such things, and our neighbours rightly make fun of this.’<sup>6</sup> In this respect

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<sup>3</sup> In this contribution ‘industry’ includes all economic activities in which raw materials are changed into products, including mineral mining, building industries, and utilities, regardless of the size of the firm. These economic activities are to be found in the 18 corporate classes of the 1930 corporate census.

<sup>4</sup> *Statistical mind* refers here to the recognition of the importance of a professional and lasting collection of data for the purpose of obtaining knowledge and insight, which are important for policy, legislation, administration, and science.

<sup>5</sup> Blink, ‘De Nederlandsche Statistiek in het bijzonder de economische statistiek’, 2. Also see: Blink, ‘Kenniss van den economischen toestand van Nederland en zijne koloniën’, 44; Blink, *Het statistisch beeld van Nederland*, 251.

<sup>6</sup> Blink, ‘De Nederlandsche Statistiek in verband met de kennis van Nederland’, 2.

the Netherlands became the laughingstock of Europe. And when the government did publish information, Blink felt that the information was not true, which led to handbooks both within the country and internationally that gave a false picture of the real situation in the Netherlands. In addition, the lack of dependable and detailed statistical materials in many areas resulted in an ad hoc policy. In his tirade Blink even went so far as to say that ‘statistical’ ignorance was the reason for the Dutch weakness and errors in many respects. Blink believed that the lack of statistical materials and the pitiful level of what did exist were discouraging to studying questions that could not be solved without dependable statistics on industry. He also regarded it as a matter of course that this was minimally necessary so that the government could properly manage the development, extent, and geographic distribution of the sources of welfare, and thus also understand industry. In this regard he not only had in mind the importance of statistics for the government, but also the importance of statistics for the citizen in a democratic society: ‘Especially in the democratic countries, where the people participate directly and indirectly in the management of the state, provinces, and local government, in their concern for education, trade, industry, agriculture, labour interests, etc. it is a primary requirement that everyone should have the opportunity, without having to pore through large reports and records, to get an overview of the situations in his own country and (still, JvG) the colonies [...]’.<sup>7</sup>

Blink had a low opinion of the statistical materials that had been collected up to 1912: completely variable data, brought together with varying aims, without any unity or comprehensiveness.<sup>8</sup> To support his argument, Blink provided an overview of what had been assembled in the nineteenth century in the Netherlands in the area of statistics, both ‘as tables and descriptively’. To do this he may have used the inventory of largely official statistical information about the nineteenth century that had been published in 1902 by the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS). This overview included references to where statistical information could be found about various aspects of Dutch industry, such as an overview of excisable enterprises, the application of steam tools, the number of limited companies and bankruptcies.<sup>9</sup> This CBS publication also stated: ‘A *general* (emphasis JvG) statistic on industry does not

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<sup>7</sup> Blink, *Het statistisch beeld van Nederland.*, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Blink, ‘De Nederlandsche Statistiek in het bijzonder de economische statistiek in verband met de kennis van Nederland’, 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> CBS, *Geschiedenis van de statistiek in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*. For industry, see 135-151.

yet exist in this country; but there have been attempts to develop one to the extent possible, and to collect information in this area.’<sup>10</sup>

As regards the statistics on industry, Blink referred to various publications such as the *Aperçu* by d’Alphonse, the details concerning financial resources, local and provincial reports, the reports of the Chambers of Commerce and Factories, and publications of the Dutch Society for Promoting Industry (Nederlandse Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid). In 1859 this society, which is not a government department but a private organization, unified the information on industry in a single document for all of the Netherlands, and published it as *Staat van de Nederlandsche Fabrieken* (State of the Dutch Factories).<sup>11</sup> In 1874 the same society, working together with the Dutch Department of Internal Affairs, compiled a comparable summary from local reports.<sup>12</sup> This summary - which like the summary from 1859 was not comprehensive - was published with the financial support of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The minister expressed the hope that the publication of 1874 could begin to function as a standard for regular editions and revisions of the regulations for local policy makers, and eventually would result in ‘a reasonably good statistic on industry.’<sup>13</sup> Partly because of the lack of cooperation from corporate industry, this hope remained illusory.

Although both government and corporate industry needed good insight into the structure of industry and other economic sectors, it seemed very difficult to realize this goal - practically, organizationally and financially. The only Dutch government organization at the beginning of the twentieth century that was active in the area of what Blink called ‘economic geography’,<sup>14</sup> was the Trade Section of the Department of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade, which had been established in 1907. One of this section's initiatives resulted in two illustrated advertising publications: one from 1910 in French and one from 1912 in English.<sup>15</sup> A two-part publication, *Beschrijving van Handel en Nijverheid in Nederland* (Description of Trade and Industry in the Netherlands), compiled by J.C.A. Everwijn, head of the Trade Section of the Ministry

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<sup>10</sup> *Geschiedenis van de statistiek in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, 137.

<sup>11</sup> *Staat van de Nederlandsche fabrieken volgens de verslagen der gemeenten*

<sup>12</sup> *Statistiek van de fabrieks- en ambachtsnijverheid in Nederland*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.

<sup>14</sup> Blink, ‘Een handleiding voor de studie der economische geographie’, 246-252.

<sup>15</sup> *Aperçu du Commerce et de l’Industrie des Pays Bas* (1910) and *A General View of Trade and Industry in the Netherlands*.

of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade appeared in the same year.<sup>16</sup> The bases for this summary work, part of the collection of data and maps for a separate supplementary Economic Atlas, were really Blink's work. Although this publication was referred to as the first extensive description of Dutch industry, the compilers were very aware that the goal of a complete statistic for industry had not yet been achieved.<sup>17</sup> The collection of materials was too fragmentary and varied to fulfil this goal. In order to achieve the goal, Blink called for a permanent organization that would periodically collect uniform data about industry and process scientific statistics in this area.

The *Beschrijving van Handel en Nijverheid in Nederland* from 1912 was limited to trade in merchandise and industry in a restricted sense.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the compilers did not consider including the industrial middle class. There was a special reason for this: taking an example from what was happening abroad, on 9 June 1904 a Koninklijk Besluit (Royal decree) established a State Commission for the Middle Class. This commission was charged with investigating whether the government should take steps to help the middle class. It was to advise the government about ways to pursue such an investigation and what the basis for such a policy should be. This commission had to deal with a totally unknown area. In order to obtain an idea about the middle class, a Royal decree on 15 September 1908 established a Commission for an Inquiry into the Middle Class.<sup>19</sup> Pragmatic considerations, as well as the desire not to misrepresent the facts, convinced the commission not to limit quantitatively what would be understood as the middle class. The commission preferred to organize its work as an investigation into a 'certain number of areas of trade and industry', specifically those in which independent entrepreneurs were employed.<sup>20</sup>

The commission conceal that the lack of statistical materials made the investigation more difficult: 'The commission also feels it to be a serious lack that there are still no statistics for industry in our country. It is convinced that the existence of such statistics would not only have made its task easier in many respects, but would

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16 Everwijn, *Beschrijving van handel en nijverheid in Nederland*.

17 *Ibid.*, part 1 Introduction.

18 A description of transport, money and securities, fisheries, agriculture, and the concerns of trade and industry closely related to agriculture (such as the dairy industry and trade in cattle, land, and gardening products) are not included.

19 *Verslag van het onderzoek naar den toestand van den handeldrijvenden en industrieelen middenstand*.

20 Second Section. *Beschouwing over den algemeenen toestand van den handeldrijven en industrieelen middenstand*, 235.

also have yielded better results.’<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the commission complained about the lack of cooperation by the entrepreneurs and about how difficult it was to find investigators with sufficient skills.<sup>22</sup>

The extensive and time-consuming investigation by the commission took ten years to complete. The result included a summary of the investigation of 32 separate areas, in alphabetical order, from contractors through saddlemakers, as well as a description of the middle class according to locality and province. Although the commission collected a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data about the middle class, unfortunately, a general statistical overview was not included, probably because the chairman of the commission of inquiry had died before this could be written. Because the investigation related to the period from 1874 to 1914, the results were out of date as soon as it had been published (in 1918), rendering it of little practical use.

### **The labour factor**

Blinks's critical explanations were especially relevant for specific data related to industry, such as the number of enterprises and the number of people employed in these enterprises, the nature of the enterprises, and their geographic distribution. He felt it was more important to collect a systematic, regular acquisition and treatment of data and about the structure for industry as a whole. Statistical data about industry that had been collected for a different purpose but contained information about industry were not taken into account by him. This was especially relevant for the occupational numbers that were linked to the population census beginning in 1849. In any event, the consecutive occupational numbers provided an insight into trends and the relative importance of industry and its component parts in the Dutch economy, insofar as it showed opportunities for work.<sup>23</sup>

Further, there was also the data acquisition related to social issues. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, a network of politicians, doctors, engineers, senior civil servants, and organized workers demanded legislation, both to protect workers on their jobs and to improve their living accommodations and conditions of life. The call for action by the government was accompanied by increased statistical activity,

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<sup>21</sup> *Inleiding tot het verslag van het onderzoek naar den toestand van den handeldrijven en industrieelen middenstand in Nederland*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 17, 20-21, 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> Van Maarseveen, ‘Beroepstellingen 1849-1971/2000’, 115-145.



which although it served a different purpose, did reveal relevant statistical information about Dutch industry. Illustrative in this regard are the industrial inquiries by H.W.E. Struve and A.A. Bekaar from 1888 to 1890 and the statistics on accidents from 1903. The industrial inquiry was a systematic inventory of Dutch industry, with specific information about individual enterprises, that had been initiated by the government. The statistics about accidents, which emerged from the Industrial Injuries Law of 1901, provided a dynamic picture of the development from 1903 of a select part of Dutch corporate industry in general, and especially of industry in its pre-corporate census phase.

### *The Industrial Inquiry of 1888 to 1890*

In the House of Representatives' session of 13 October 1886, a commission was appointed to hold an inquiry into how the law of 19 September 1874 was operating, which 'included measures to counter the excessive labour and neglect of children'. When parliament recessed in 1887 this commission was forced prematurely to cease its work and in its final report was only able to cover industry in the province of Limburg, the city of Amsterdam, and the flax industry in Tilburg. In 1887, at the insistence of the House of Representatives, the government decided to institute a follow-up national investigation into factories and workshops. The organization and implementation of this was directed by H.W.E. Struve, engineer for steam engineering in Amsterdam and A.A. Bekaar, engineer for transport and communication in Maastricht. The inquiry extended throughout all of the Netherlands, except for Tilburg and Limburg, which had been already reported on in 1887.<sup>24</sup> Struve and Bekaar's industrial statistics was the first investigation into Dutch industry in which data had not been collected through a written inquiry but systematically, through personal visits.<sup>25</sup> The Minister of Communications, Trade, and Industry had determined that the data was to be collected, as far as possible, through personal investigation, especially into factories and workshops where more than ten people worked in a closed area and where a power tool was used. On the basis of these guidelines, the investigation was principally relevant for middle and large industrial firms. In total, data was collected for 3,043 factories and workshops about the nature

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<sup>24</sup> *Enquête betreffende werking en uitbreiding der wet van 19 september 1874*

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.neha.nl/struve/index.html>. The data for all separate factories and workshops are presented schematically in registers according to province. The firms are divided into sixteen different categories of industries.

of the firm, its employees, mechanization, working conditions, safety and health risks, and the social provisions associated with the industrial establishment.

In fact, Struve and Bekaar, who were aware of the limitations and incompleteness of their inquiry, were able to provide a picture of the Dutch large industrial firm. Their statistical unit consisted of factories and workshops. That is why the inquiry is a census of establishments, or independent, physical industrial organizations and workshops, and is *not* an industrial census.<sup>26</sup> Struve and Bekaar only included the small firm (with fewer than ten employees) in their inquiry if the enterprise used a power tool. This included 464 firms, which was only a fraction of the number of small industrial establishments.<sup>27</sup> Because of this the small industrial firm remained a significant unknown variable.

*The Accident Statistics of the Rijksverzekeringsbank (government insurance bank)*

A few years later, in 1894, the State Rochussen Commission advised the government to introduce a bill whose aim would be to legally require employers to insure their employees against complete or partial, temporary or permanent disability resulting from an accident.<sup>28</sup> It took until 2 January 1901 before the Industrial Injuries Law appeared in the *Staatsblad*. The law, which provided for insuring workers against the financial consequences of accidents, came into effect in 1903. Those enterprises that did not have any employees were not covered by the law. Beginning in 1903 annual reports appeared that contained an overview of the number of firms that were required to carry insurance, divided according to company size (based on the number of workers employed) and economic activity.<sup>29</sup> Until the Industrial Injuries Law was revised in 1921, the numbers only included 'dangerous' enterprises in the industrial, transport, communications, trade, and service sectors.<sup>30</sup> It is probable that the law was intended to protect workers employed in enterprises that were regarded as entailing more than a normal risk of accident (especially middling large and large firms were included among those required to carry insurance). This implied that small

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<sup>26</sup> Van Gerwen and Seegers, 'De industrialisatie van Nederland', 138-171.

<sup>27</sup> The total number of industrial enterprises counted in Nederland according to the 1874 census came to 33,640 (Geudeker, *Nijverheidsregistratuur in Nederland*, 31).

<sup>28</sup> Van Gerwen, *Zoeken naar Zekerheid, part III. De Ontluikende Verzorgingsstaat*. 161.

<sup>29</sup> *Ongevallenstatistiek betreffende het kalenderjaar 1903 etc., Statistische Jaarcijfers 1903-1939*. These statistics also include interesting information about changes in the extent of enterprises as a result of van openings and closings.

<sup>30</sup> It is often stated that the Industrial Injuries Law dealt exclusively with employers and industrial firms, which is why it is sometimes referred to as industrial accident insurance. This is not the case.

and middling firms were underrepresented in the statistics until 1921. Moreover, in the early years small and middling firms were underrepresented because they, for whatever reason, avoided registering as enterprises that were required to carry insurance.<sup>31</sup> This was why, in the early years following the implementation of the Industrial Injuries Law, a fairly large number of enterprises that were required to carry insurance were not yet known to the administrative organ of the Rijksverzekeringsbank.

Between 1903 and 1921 the application of the law and the decisions of the Central Board of Appeals resulted in the number of enterprises required to carry insurance and the number of insured personnel being repeatedly expanded. In 1921 there was an important revision of the law whereby a larger number of enterprises would then be covered.<sup>32</sup> Beginning with the revision of 1921 all enterprises except those in the agricultural, marine, and fishing sectors were in principle covered by the Industrial Injuries Law. Some publications suggested that the statistics on accidents provide a fairly complete picture of the extent of Dutch corporate industry.<sup>33</sup> This view is true to the extent that it dealt with the *personnel* in the enterprises that were required to carry insurance. Those independent small firms without any employees did not fall within the law.

With the assistance of the Industrial Inquiry of 1888 to 1890 and the statistics on accidents, it is clear that from 1903 on it was the social legislation that was in fact responsible for the existence of important one-time as well as regular statistical data about Dutch industry before 1930. In other words, it was especially the social motivations that were the basis for the statistical acquisition and registration of the industrial data, rather than economic, policy-making, or scientific motivations.<sup>34</sup> Precisely for that reason the data acquisition was relevant for middling and large industrial enterprises, that is, industrial enterprises that contained wage-earning employees. This was why the extensive small industrial firm that operated without such wage-earning personnel remained completely outside consideration.

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31 Van der Does, *De Economische beteekenis der sociale verzekering*, 15.

32 *Ongevallenstatistiek 1920-1921*, IV; Gewijzigde Ongevallenwet. In addition to the Industrial Injuries Law of 1901 special Injuries Laws were passed for the marine industry and the agriculture and gardening sectors.

33 See for example: Van der Does, *De Economische beteekenis der sociale verzekering*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, it was also true for other summaries such as steam engineering and the registration for labour inspection: *De fabrieken en werkplaatsen vallende onder de Veiligheidswet*.

## **The First World War as catalyst**

The special wartime conditions in the neutral Netherlands required the government to take on a more guiding role, even economically. At the same time, it became clear that in order to formulate policy and various measures in the area of production and use, consumption, foreign trade, prices, and finances, the available statistical materials were not reliable enough. There was an especially great void of statistical information about the supply of raw materials, their production, distribution, and consumption. That was the reason that during the war years increasing activity in the area of statistics was observed in the Netherlands. The need for statistical materials led to the Statistics on Production and Use (Law of 1 December 1917). The basis for this law was a recommendation on 27 February 1917 by the Commission on Industry to the CBS.<sup>35</sup> This recommendation stated that a large number of Western countries (most of them as early as the second half of the nineteenth century) had access to extensive statistics on production. In the Netherlands, however, hardly any official statistics existed about industrial production. Summaries were indeed maintained about excisable items such as for distilled products, beer, sugar and salt. In addition, summaries were maintained for the shipbuilding industry (the Trade, Industrial, and Shipping Reports) and for stone manufacture by the Inspector for Labour at Arnhem, and for a few individual organizations such as the Association of Dutch Ironmongers. The government commission that had been established to deal with the wartime conditions included temporary producers' associations that had available a small amount of production information, but these were mainly based on estimates. Moreover, they were only temporary. The recommendation also stated 'that the Netherlands was considerably behind various other countries in its knowledge of its production and consumption.'<sup>36</sup>

The Law of 1 December 1917 gave the CBS the authority to acquire all necessary information 'to gain accurate statistics about production and use', and had an obligatory character for those firms that had been part of the inquiry. After the First World War the Statistics for Production and Use were expanded. Beginning in 1921 these annual statistics provided detailed information about production, use, added value, and labour efforts for several dozen industries. The statistics were compiled

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<sup>35</sup> *Bijdragen tot de statistiek van Nederland. Statistiek van de Voortbrenging en het Verbruik der Nederlandsche Nijverheid in 1913 en 1916*, xi-xii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

through direct interviews of firms by the CBS. A limitation of these statistics was that this information only included *part* of the total industry.<sup>37</sup> Not all classes of firms were interviewed. Moreover, the statistics were only relevant for middling and large enterprises.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the Statistics for Production and Use, during the war years there was a reorganization of the statistics on trade, and the statistics on prices (wholesale and retail prices) were improved. Budgetary investigations were also implemented. From a statistical point of view, the First World War can therefore be seen as a catalyst. The wartime circumstances in combination with some legal coercion surmounted the previously existing opposition.<sup>39</sup> In the first half of the 20s the government, pressured by corporate industry, but also because of financial considerations, loosened its reins on the economy. As a result, there was a drastic cut in the Statistics for Production and Use.

### **Geudeker's summary**

At the request of the Dutch Institute of Efficiency, Th. C. Geudeker gave a lecture about the industrial statistics during the Efficiency Days in October 1931.<sup>40</sup> As a follow-up to Blink, he made an inventory of statistical sources in Dutch industry from 1810 to the industrial census of 1930. Unlike Blink, Geudeker's summary of statistical information was more complete because he paid more attention to the census of occupations and the registrations in the Labour Inspection Section. Geudeker was also able to add new sources of information, which became available after 1912, the year of Blink's cut-off. These included the Statistics for Use and the Trade Register. The Law on Trade Register was established in 1918. This law determined that just about *all* enterprises that were established in the Netherlands were required to register in the Register, which was intended to function as a civil registry for corporate industry.<sup>41</sup> Although it had been intended that the regional registers would be the bases for compiling a central Trade Register, that plan was only able to be realized long after

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<sup>37</sup> De Jong, *De Nederlandse industrie 1913-1965*, 14-20, 339-365. Also see: Kloek, *De ontwikkeling van de gegevensverzameling bij bedrijven*, 19-47.

<sup>38</sup> The criteria for inclusion of enterprises within the selected classes of industry in the annual censuses are often based on the number of employees, but sometimes also on the size of production.

<sup>39</sup> Idenburg, 'Geschiedenis der Nederlandse statistiek', part 1, contributions 2, 7-9.

<sup>40</sup> Geudeker, *Nijverheidsregistratuur in Nederland*.

<sup>41</sup> For each enterprise registered, the Trade Register includes a dossier with information about the owners and directors of the enterprises, their origins, the name of the enterprise, and information about the nature of the enterprise.

the Second World War. But from 1925 the Trade Address Book and Industry Register for the Netherlands appeared for several years.<sup>42</sup> What was special about this address book is that it contained all the addresses and dossier numbers for all the enterprises registered in the Trade Registers of the Chambers of Commerce, arranged alphabetically, in columns.

Geudeker's major contribution was that he meticulously compiled as complete a summary as possible of all relevant sources of statistical of statistical materials about Dutch industry from the nineteenth century to 1930. Despite the impressive amount of material, Geudeker was forced to conclude that there had been little improvement from the situation that Blink had described almost twenty years previously. Geudeker put it this way: 'If within this task (of the Dutch Institute for Efficiency, JvG) should be comprehended providing a description of a central administrative instrument that would register the structure of industry and reveal its general practices, then this task could not be fulfilled. In fact, in large measure Professor H. Blink's outspoken reproach of almost twenty years before was still true: 'Our industrial statistics are in such a state that they do not exist at all.' Repeatedly, when intervening with unforeseen events or with the preparations of regulations a special investigation had to precede the preparation of legislation, because there were either no organizations that could provide the information or those that existed were unable to address the task for lack of information. The severe inadequacy of the available informational apparatus in the war years was painfully revealed [...].'<sup>43</sup> Moreover, according to Geudeker, the 'peculiar existence of orienting data' contribute to the fact that the 'strangest concepts regarding the situation in the Netherlands were able to take root outside our regions.'<sup>44</sup>

Geudeker also concluded that every organization and department had its own motives and goals when collecting the information, which meant that there was hardly any relation between the great diversity in the entities of the statistics that had been collected. Moreover, the statistical materials that were collected were incomplete, undependable, contained few details, and were often aggregated. The materials left much to be desired regarding accuracy and completeness. This was especially the case for statistical data about the structure of Dutch industry as a whole.

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<sup>42</sup> See for example, *Handels-Adresboek. Bedrijfsregister voor Nederland 1929-1930*.

<sup>43</sup> Geudeker, *Nijverheidsregistratuur in Nederland*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

### **The 1930 corporate census**

Despite the government's and corporate industry's relatively uncooperative attitude, from 1899 the Central Commission for Statistics (CCS) unremittingly continued behind the scenes to advocate holding regular corporate censuses, not only to obtain a clear view of the structure of industry, but for Dutch corporate industry as a whole.

*'The path of suffering'*<sup>45</sup>

In a letter of 23 November 1899 the CCS already advised the then Minister of Foreign Affairs to hold a corporate census. The CCS supported this recommendation - among other ways by pointing to foreign examples - as follows: 'The Commission believes that the desirability of good corporate statistics, which provides knowledge about the sources of existence of the Dutch people, does not require an exhaustive argument. The lack of dependable information regarding the economic situation and development of our corporate industry has already been deplored by scholars and practitioners. In almost all of the European states [...] and in the United States of North America questions about the sources of popular existence have been answered, while in our nation these issues are still veiled in almost complete darkness. It surely does not need to be further explained that learning the number of existing enterprises in our country, their nature, and their extent would similarly be of use for science, legislation, and administration, and that these data would gain even more importance if [...] these censuses, as would occupational censuses, were to be held regularly.'<sup>46</sup>

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Commerce, Trade, and Industry initially seem to be convinced that good and dependable corporate statistics would be useful. In 1901 they tasked a commission to develop a plan. The chairman and secretary of this commission, C. A. Verrijn Stuart and H. W. Methorst, even travelled to Berlin and Brussels to become informed about the corporate censuses that were held in Germany and Belgium. In a 1903 report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs the CCS further elucidated how useful a corporate census would be for science, legislation, and

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45 Geudeker, *Nijverheidsregistratuur in Nederland*, 66. Also see: Atsma, 'Structuur van het bedrijfsleven, 369 and Atsma, 'Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978', 225-288. In his contributions about the history of industry in the Netherlands, Atsma pays extensive attention to the interpretation of the concept of corporation in the consecutive censuses and the discussions about maintaining the confidentiality of individual information.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted from: Ritzen and Van der Ven, 'Structuuronderzoek naar het bedrijfsleven in Nederland', 30-31.

administration. A corporate census was of essential importance for obtaining a clear insight into the structure of corporate industry, the nature and extent of economic activities, their relative importance, the regional distribution of economic activities and the aspects of employment opportunities associated with them, the internal relationship of economic activities, and the development of these aspects of corporate industry over time.<sup>47</sup> Based on that plan, in 1904 the same commission received notice that the available financing would not permit such a substantial expense (325,000 guilders, according to current equivalents, about three million euros).<sup>48</sup>

In 1907 the CCS again proposed the plan to hold a corporate census in addition to the population and occupational censuses. If there were insufficient means to do this, the CCS itself would prefer to hold a corporate census over a population census. This proposal was also rejected. Technical objections and above all financial ones (the unfavourable situation of government finances) were the reasons the government advanced in 1917 and in the following years to reject plans to hold a corporate census.<sup>49</sup> In 1926 a corporate census was again considered in connection with the 11th population census, which would be held in 1930. In this regard the CCS pointed out that other censuses only provided a fragmentary insight into Dutch corporate industry: ‘Neither the occupational census that would be held in conjunction with the population census (which are based on a completely different premise, since they do not count enterprises but individual occupations), nor the statistics on production, which only cover a relatively small part of corporate industry, nor the Director General of Labour’s card registry, [...] nor the statistics of the Rijksverzekeringsbank (government insurance bank) are able to fill in this gap.’<sup>50</sup> The CCS added to this: ‘especially now that Dutch industry is developing steadily, and it increasingly seems that to support the national and international interests of industry (in the widest sense), government should become knowledgeable about corporate industry.’<sup>51</sup>

An increasing need for a corporate census also appeared in the Provisional Report of the Commission of Observers from the First House of Parliament about the

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<sup>47</sup> Atsma, ‘Structuur van het bedrijfsleven. Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 369 and Atsma, ‘Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 225-288.

<sup>48</sup> *Bedrijfstelling 1930*, part I III, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Atsma, ‘Structuur van het bedrijfsleven. Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 368.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted from: Atsma, ‘Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 230.

<sup>51</sup> Ritzen and Van der Ven, ‘Structuuronderzoek naar het bedrijfsleven in Nederland’, 30-31. *Jaarverslag Centrale Commissie voor de Statistiek*, 1927.



development of a Law to Establish the Government Budget for fiscal 1927, which refers to the need for corporate statistics. The Minister of Labour, Trade, and Industry wrote on 19 February 1927 to his colleague, the Minister of Interior Affairs and Agriculture, that he believed a corporate census was necessary. A few months later he openly admitted his willingness to support this effort by working toward holding a corporate census. Meanwhile, the central employers' organizations and the Industrial Board advanced objections to holding a corporate census.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the objections were principally related to the approach, organization, costs, and administrative burden. A special subcommission that also included employers viewed compiling corporate statistics as desirable. In order to make progress, this subcommission developed a plan of approach whereby, as far as possible, the statistics would include information already collected by other organizations, such as data from the accident statistics of the Rijksverzekeringsbank. The data for those enterprises that were not included among those required to be insured would be collected on a punch card which had been provided for this purpose together with the population census cards.<sup>53</sup> Through this time-consuming approach, the 1930 corporate census would take longer than had been anticipated.

Only after the government had decided in November 1928 to compile a general summary of Dutch enterprises, could the preparatory work be undertaken for holding a corporate census. This resulted in the Law on the Corporate Census of 31 July 1930, which contained measures for obtaining a one-time accurate set of corporate statistics. The Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) was charged with compiling this. Noticeable was the ambivalent stance of the employers' organizations in this phase. On the one hand they were prepared to detach an expert to the CBS, but on the other hand they clearly showed that this action could not in the least be viewed as a general agreement with the corporate census that would be held.<sup>54</sup> Similar to the statistics for production and use, the law included penalties if a respondent refused to provide information or gave incorrect answers.

Finally, on New Year's Eve, 1930, after about thirty years of efforts by the CCS, the first corporate census in the Netherlands was able to be held. For certain types of enterprises, such as seasonal firms, a different date had been established. H.

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<sup>52</sup> Atsma, 'Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978' 230-231. Also see: *Jaarverslag Centrale Commissie voor de Statistiek* 1927, 7-10.

<sup>53</sup> *Bedrijfstelling 31 December 1930*. Foreword, VII.

<sup>54</sup> Atsma, 'Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978', 230.

W. Methorst, then director general of the CBS, afterwards happily established that the first Dutch corporate census provided insight into ‘a very important part of Dutch corporate industry [...] about which, with regard to various industrial groups and different points, up to now little or nothing had been known.’<sup>55</sup> Geudeker made his previously cited inventory at a time when information from the first corporate census was still being worked on. He hoped that ‘this first census would mark a new period of better insight into the great importance of proper industrial statistics in this country.’<sup>56</sup> Even before the published results, he could not really help describing the first corporate census as a ‘somewhat limited set of corporate statistics’ because, from the point of view of cost savings - as opposed to other foreign corporate censuses - no information had been collected about, for example, the capital invested in the enterprises, the age of the firms, the value of the buildings, or the corporate results.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, following the first corporate census of 1930 the government was convinced that it was useful to hold such regular censuses. In the Memorandum of Information for a new corporate census law this aspect was especially stressed: ‘The useful effect of corporate censuses as a means for increasing knowledge about Dutch economic development is increased significantly precisely through regular repetition.’<sup>58</sup> Periodic censuses would in any case enable tracing of changes in corporate industry. This was desirable not only from a scientific point of view, but also to policy-making in the economic and social areas.

On 16 March 1939 a new corporate census law was instituted. Article 1 of this law stated: ‘In the year 1940 and then every ten years thereafter a general corporate census will be held in the land.’<sup>59</sup> By ratifying the international *Agreement with attached protocol regarding economic statistics of 14 December 1928*, the Dutch government had more or less committed itself in 1932 to hold a new census at least once every ten years.<sup>60</sup> The 1940 corporate census, which had already been planned and prepared for, had to be delayed because of the war footing. The consequence was a statistical gap. The second corporate census only took place on 16 October 1950. After 1950 two more corporate censuses were held, in 1963 and in 1978. Thereafter, the corporate censuses gave way to what were called ‘structural censuses’. The basis

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, IX.

<sup>56</sup> Geudeker, *Nijverheidsregistratuur in Nederland*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> Ritzen and Van der Ven, ‘Structuuronderzoek naar het bedrijfsleven in Nederland’, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Atsma, ‘Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’ 233-234.

<sup>60</sup> Idenburg, ‘Geschiedenis der Nederlandse statistiek’, 19-20.

for these comprised a General Corporate Register (ABR). Following the census of 1963 the CBS began setting up this register.<sup>61</sup>

### **Explanations**

The first corporate census in the Netherlands finally took place in 1930. What were the reasons that this first corporate census was held so much later in the Netherlands than were similar efforts abroad? By examining its entire lengthy history, it can be established that a combination of factors and circumstances played a role in this. Surely the practical implications of a census (organization, time, money) formed an important hindrance. On the other hand, if government and corporate industry had been convinced of the usefulness of a census, creative solutions would have been sought out earlier to obtain the necessary financial means.<sup>62</sup> Ph. J. Idenburg, director general of the CBS, perceived that the liberal climate in the Netherlands was an important barrier to breaking through to a *statistical mind* in government and corporate industry. He formulated it as follows: ‘Liberalism did not look upon statistics sympathetically. Economically it regarded the free play of forces as the best way to prosperity, socially it raised the individual far above the community, and viewed it as the best way to protect his freedom of movement. [The liberal point of view perceived using] statistics as an instrument for registering social phenomena in the hands of an entity that may have to intervene in relationships as a corrective force or perhaps even directing them, as inappropriate in this climate of opinion. Questions about data on the part of [...] statistical services are received suspiciously by corporate industry and answered reluctantly; they were perceived as indiscreet intrusions on its independence [...]. Its place was in the halls of science, not the administration and management of the forces of society.’<sup>63</sup>

The prevailing laissez-faire government policy with regard to corporate industry was undoubtedly influential for statistical data collection. Driven by a liberal vision, the government preferred to abstain from intervening in corporate industry. An active economic policy, for example, in the form of promoting trade or industrial policy, was in principle not viewed as a government task. That is why the interest in

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<sup>61</sup> Atsma, ‘Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 234-235; Atsma, ‘Economische Basistellingen 1946-1988’, 324-328; Ritzen, ‘Bedrijfstellingen nieuwe stijl 1980-2000. Van tellen naar schatten’, 363-402.

<sup>62</sup> Illustrative is the rapid implementation of the Law of 1 December 1917, see: Kloek, ‘De ontwikkeling van de gegevensverzameling bij bedrijven’, 20-21.

<sup>63</sup> Idenburg, ‘Geschiedenis der Nederlandse statistiek’, 3.

data to carry out such a policy was not very great. The social question and the First World War brought a change in this reluctant attitude on the part of the government.

At the same time corporate industry was not sitting and waiting for external intervention in internal corporate affairs and inquiring civil servants. This was regarded as a threat to free enterprise production. There were also various other motives that played a role, such as concern about revealing corporate information, despite the agreements about confidentiality and the costs associated with the administrative fuss. This is apparent from the following complaint by a textile manufacturer.<sup>64</sup> ‘If you also want all the questions carefully answered, then you have to hire one extra employee to do this, and a year later this employee would have to be dismissed only to try to get him back 5 or 6 years later, when the information has to be sent in again [...]. It would be interesting to find out how many accountants or civil servants you could have the government send out [...]. Whenever one after another of these gentlemen have come, it would take at least two months work to answer everything, while, besides, a part of the personnel would have to be set aside to obtain all the information.’<sup>65</sup> Intervening in internal corporate affairs, the administrative fuss, as well as lack of interest, caused corporate industry not to have a great deal of incentive to willingly provide an active contribution to statistical data collection. It was especially the large enterprises and entrepreneurs that regarded the statistical data that was available in the 20s as quite sufficient to obtain a good insight into Dutch industry. Not without a certain arrogance, it was frankly stated that it was unnecessary to be concerned ‘with the large mass of very small enterprises, which indeed provide a comparatively large number of people with their means of existence but, practically speaking, are not very influential for social life.’<sup>66</sup> Based on the 1930 corporate census, it was a matter of about 46 per cent of the total number of industrial enterprises. C. F. Stork, a manufacturer and CCS member, was one of the few people who called for statistics from corporate industry.<sup>67</sup>

It is possible that the relatively late Dutch industrialization played a retarding role in the breakthrough to government and corporate industry's realization that good industrial statistics are an essential aid to obtaining insight into the extent, development, and geographic distribution of industry. At the same time it should be

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<sup>64</sup> Kloek, ‘De ontwikkeling van de gegevensverzameling bij bedrijven’, 27-28.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in: Kloek, ‘De ontwikkeling van de gegevensverzameling bij bedrijven’, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in: Atsma, ‘Bedrijfstellingen 1930-1978’, 231.

<sup>67</sup> Kloek, ‘Ontwikkeling van de gegevensverzameling bij bedrijven’, 30.

noted that until 1930 the structures of the trade and service sectors from a statistical point of view were hardly charted either.

## **Conclusion**

From the nineteenth century until 1950 a significant diversity of statistical materials about Dutch industry has been collected, registered, and publicized. Based on the overviews compiled by H. Blink and Th.C. Geudeker in 1912 and 1931, respectively, we can conclude that the statistical data about industry that had been collected up to then was often incidental and incomplete. The information had been collected for various purposes, contained holes, lacked compatibility and there was no attempt at maintaining regularity. Its acquisition was not based on any principles of organization, direction, coordination, continuity or methodical approach. Moreover, in collecting the data an appeal was made, often in vain, to active voluntary cooperation on the part of corporate industry.

The general ten-yearly occupational censuses were an exception to this rule, as they provided insight into the development of industry to the extent that it related to employment. Data about the input and output for sectors of industry in the form of production and use statistics only date from the First World War.

To the extent any systematic data were collected and registered before 1930, such as, for example, for use in the accident statistics, the basic motives for this were not economic but principally social. It related to data collection about industry that resulted from legal regulations (the labour and safety laws) whose aim was to protect labour from the circumstances of work. The nature of this data collection meant that the extensive number of small industrial firms were largely omitted.

The year 1930 marks an important caesura in the way statistical material about Dutch corporate industry in general and industry in particular was collected. In addition to data about employment, production and use, the first corporate census made data available about the demographic composition of all of Dutch corporate industry: data about enterprises, establishments, technical units, activities carried out, size, location, and legal form. Based on these, government, corporate industry, scientists, and other interested parties were able to obtain a good picture of the structure of Dutch industry.

A combination of factors contributed to the fact that the first corporate census in the Netherlands only took place in 1930, long after other Western countries had

preceded the Netherlands. In addition to practical hindrances (organization, time, and money), for a long time neither the government nor corporate industry was prepared to invest in obtaining systematic, regular, detailed data about industry. Only very gradually was there a breakthrough to the insight that a thorough statistical basis was an indispensable instrument for analysis and policy. This development was completed against a background of a changed socio-economic order, one in which government began to play a more active role in the economic area. The First World War functioned as a catalyst for this process. Thereafter, it took another twelve years before the long-lasting efforts of the CBS finally resulted in the first corporate census of 1930. In this respect the Netherlands was a statistical latecomer in the matter of specific numbers about the structure of industry.

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*Staat van de Nederlandsche fabrieken volgens de verslagen der gemeenten, die aan het Ministerie van Binnenlandsche Zaken worden gezonden. Uitgegeven door de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter bevordering van Nijverheid* (Haarlem 1859).

*Statistiek van de fabrieks- en ambachtsnijverheid in Nederland, getrokken uit de verslagen, welke door burgemeester en wethouders, ingevolge art. 182 der gemeentewet, jaarlijks den gemeenteraad worden aangeboden. Uitgegeven door het Departement van Binnenlandsche Zaken* (Den Haag 1874).

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