

Swiss postal, telegraph and telephone services [to be continued]

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SWISS POSTAL, TELEGRAPH AND TELEPHONE SERVICES

The Secretary General of the Swiss PTT, Dr. A. Morant, gave a talk at a dinner of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique at the Montana Hotel in London, on 3rd March 1966. He began by stressing the sympathy the management of PTT had for the Swiss living abroad and mentioned as just one token the special stamp "Die fünfte Schweiz", which will be on sale from 1st June and will go out into the world commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

He then gave an outline of some general problems of the largest transport and communications enterprise of Switzerland. The PTT Enterprises are at a critical juncture in their development. Their financial position worsens continually and alarmingly, the volume of traffic has been increasing more rapidly than the staff employed in handling it, and the steps taken to achieve further rationalisation require a longer time to produce results than seems admissible in view of the urgency of the task. He continued:

"The problems which we face are extremely complex. All aspects of the service are obviously interrelated: the volume of traffic has its bearing on the staff, the number of staff is directly related with the standard of service offered, which again is bound up with the working time, and the latter is reflected in the finances — and conversely. There are no easy remedies at hand, and scientific management theories alone, although they may otherwise have proved excellent, do not always produce the desired effects. The future business policy of the PTT Enterprises must be based on a new vision capable of meeting the present and of anticipating the future needs. In some instances we may have to break entirely new ground, even at the risk of throwing some old traditions overboard.

"What is our present situation? The PTT as a public institution are compelled by law to perform certain services, with all their implications on staff needs and finances. The development of their services always runs more or less parallel with the general economic trend. This is reflected most strikingly in the staff sector of the PTT, where there is a very acute labour shortage. The staff requirements are dependent on the volume of traffic to be handled, as long as there is no way of replacing the postman by a robot! And it is here precisely that we differ essentially from the Federal Railways for instance, whose services are confined to the rail and therefore are more accessible to rationalisation than postal operations in the narrower sense.

"I would now like to give you a brief outline of the major aspects of our PTT services, considering, one after the other, the four following principal factors: Traffic, Services Rendered, Staff, Finances.

"To illustrate the development of **traffic**, let us take the decade 1955-1964, concentrating at first on the actual services performed in the principal fields covered by the PTT. The following postal and telecommunication traffic figures will certainly show even to the critically minded that our staff have made a major contribution to the growth of the Swiss economy.

"Postal service: Inland letterpost items 1,083 mio in 1955 (1,534 mio in 1964, increase of 41.6%), Parcels 101.8 mio (122.3 mio, 20.1%), Newspapers 653.4 mio (859.6 mio, 31.6%), Postal coach passenger service 23.0 mio passengers (34.8 mio, 51.3%).

"Telecommunications services: Telephone: Main telephone stations 795,000 (1.39 mio, 74.8%), Telephones 1.2 mio (21. mio, 75.0%), Chargeable telephone calls 881 mio. (1,600 mio, 81.6%).

"Thus, between 1955 and 1964, the whole volume of postal traffic has risen from 2,300 mio to 3,300 mio items, that is, by 43.5%. Let us now relate this proportion of the staff increase. In the postal services of the PTT, 23,911 staff members were employed in 1955, as against 30,520 in 1964, that is, a 27.6% increase over the whole period. The general trend of growth in the year 1965 was towards a certain levelling in some branches of the service. Letter post traffic only showed a 5% increase over the preceding year; parcel post was up 2.5%, and the postal coach passenger traffic 6%. On the other hand, the traffic figures of the telecommunications services, and more particularly the telephone and telex services, show no weakening of the upward trend.

"And now a word about the **standard and range of services** offered: Costs could obviously be slashed considerably by lessening the standard and range of services. However, the PTT feel that this would mean no genuine rationalisation, and therefore would prefer to abstain from such measures. The maintenance of the present standard presupposes, however, that the PTT are granted the necessary tools in the way of personnel, funds and plant. The needs of the people and of the economy will certainly be better served if they can rely on a high standard of service, even if they have to pay an adequate price for it, than if low rates have to be paid for by a poorer service.

"The determination to maintain a good standard of service does not preclude the discontinuance of services of luxury character, that is, services entailing high costs and benefiting comparatively few users, or serving no real need. It is not wholly to be excluded that urgent reasons of non-financial nature, such as the prevailing staff shortage, will compel us to make certain adjustments with regard to the range of services offered.

"The **staff issue** has been very much to the fore of late. When the PTT became aware, about the middle of last year, that the number of staff by year's end might exceed the upper limit fixed by the Federal Assembly, stricter measures were introduced immediately. But it soon appeared that too rigid a stoppage would result in substantial restrictions in the services offered and in too heavy demands made on the staff on hand. The Federal Council therefore gave instructions to apply the new provisions with some measure of flexibility, leaving it to the discretion of the PTT to find a reasonable solution in each case, in the best interest of the service. For 1966, a staff increase of 1,200 has been granted to the PTT to enable them to cope with the growing traffic.

(To be continued.)

STRIKES IN SWITZERLAND IN 1965

In 1965, there were three collective labour disputes in Switzerland, only two of which involved a stoppage of work exceeding one day. The third dispute lasted only a few hours and involved workers in foreign firms. The two disputes lasting longer than a day (compared with only one such dispute in 1964) each concerned a single firm. The number of workers affected amounted to 23 in all (350 the previous year), which represented a loss of 163 working days (4,550 in 1964). From these figures it can be seen that the labour peace introduced into Switzerland more than a quarter of a century ago still holds good. [O.S.E.C.]