

Quentin BOCQUET, "The French Post Office and Sports since 1945" (La Poste et le sport depuis 1945), master's thesis of contemporary history, directed by Pascal Griset, Paris Sorbonne - Paris 4, 2014, 203 p.

The world of work and the world of sports have been opposed for decades. The first one is indeed assimilated to labor, something you have to do for living, while the second concerns more leisure, an activity which is selfless. Meanwhile, this opposition slowly faded in the 20th century, in order to give way to an idea that sport and work complete each other more than they are in contradiction. The administration of the French Post Office and Telecommunications (Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones, or PTT) was among the first to understand the utility of promoting physical exercises for its employees.

In this purpose, PTT are singular because they have an old staff association all over the French territory which is dedicated to sports: the ASPTT (Sports Association of PTT). In 1945, all those clubs gathered into a Union, which quickly became the « armed wing » of the administration for sports. In a worn out country after six years of war, even if priorities of the reconstruction did not really concern PTT, and even less sports, physical practices in the administration knew an exceptional rise. In front of the explosion of postal flow and the deficiency of the equipment, the heads of PTT quickly understood the benefits of having both physically and mentally healthy postmen, which will help to absorb the shock of this difficult period.

This singularity of sports in the PTT leads in the sixties to a new cooperation between the ministry and the new authorities created by president de Gaulle, which will largely benefit the ASPTT. Thanks to a charter in 1965, PTT became a full participant of the project of French sport reconstruction. In the field of sport facilities mostly, the ministry of Sports found in his counterpart of the PTT a new source of financial investment, and in the ASPTT, some clubs to bring those stadiums, swimming pool or halls to life. In the 80s, those relations even got stronger to give birth to special conventions for international level athletes, who found in the PTT a regular salary and an ideal schedule for training. In both areas of leisure and competition, PTT have been one of the privileged means of action of the State in his project of developing sports in the country.

But this PTT history of sports also comes under the shifts known by an administration, who stopped being a ministry to became a company at the beginning of the 90s. In front of new economical imperatives, « social » sports progressively gave way to a more marketing and communication-oriented use. La Poste put his logo in a multitude of sporting event (Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup ...) in order to obtain the image of a dynamic company. Meanwhile, his social action through the ASPTT gradually lost importance. The clubs lost their corporatist side and had to adapt themselves to survive.

Through this history of PTT, then La Poste sports policy, we can see the major evolutions of sports in France, but also those of an administration who gave the latter a singular way.