

**Daniel BIBAUT, “The 1974 PTT Strike in Paris and the Paris Area” (“La grève des PTT en 1974 à Paris et en région parisienne”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Aimée Moutet, Paris 13, 1998, 133 p.**

As the demonstrations of May 1968 were about to begin, an editorialist for *Le Monde* wrote “France is bored.” Six years later social protest broke out once again, but this time it did not come from youths who repudiated the boredom of a society they judged to be fossilized and conformist. Within the sphere of public service where the 1974 strikes took place, there were new concerns. As a consequence of the economic crisis that began in 1974, public service became the special target of those who believed that France had to adapt to the times and above all direct its business strategies toward a market economy. This aggressive push toward insourcing and renewed competition did not take place without certain sacrifices. The ORTF was associated with the journalistic media that were held to be economically shaky and politically disturbing.

It was no secret that there was a lingering fear that a certain leftist ideology, having emerged from May 1968, was blossoming within the public service sector. In July 1974 the PTT’s secretary of state confessed: “I fear that the PTT may crumble in six months to two years time.” The Post and Telecommunications services were definitively in a period of crisis that was obvious at all levels of the business; the same tensions that existed from sorting centers to telecommunications hubs manifested themselves in the form of a strike.

Of course everything is relative. The ORTF was a small public business with 16,000 employees. This was minor compared to the PTT’s total staff of 300,000. Public television service could go on continuous strike for several months with only minor consequences for the economy and without sustaining any political upheaval. In 1974 television service was provided primarily for entertainment. Public opinion expressed little sadness when the ORTF disappeared. The PTT general strike brought a disconcerting year for public service to a close.

The final question for Serge Lottier concerned the relative success or failure of the strike. His answer took stock of 43 days of conflict: “It was a success for postal workers ... and for unionism.” It became apparent that the strike had demonstrated the unity and solidarity of all sectors of the PTT. There was a perceived coherence between Post, Telecommunications, and financial services. It was crucial that the unity of the PTT be preserved and that the separation of Post and Telecommunications into two separate entities be avoided. This fundamental issue preceded any discussion of status or problems of classification, among others. Serge Lottier emphasized that “the desire of those in power at that time to split and privatize the postal service and telecommunications had been suppressed.”

Even if the separation of postal service and telecom did become a reality later, the reform of the PTT was not as vile as the change that led to the demise of the ORTF. The 1974 strike had a recognizable effect on this reform.