

Nicolas ROY, “The History of the Institutional Publicity for the Post Office from 1970 to the 1990 Reform” (“Histoire de la publicité institutionnelle de la Poste de 1970 à la réforme de 1990”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Pascal Griset, Bordeaux 3, 1998, 120 p.

The course set in the 1970s by the former State administration for public operators in the early 1990s becomes apparent as we retrace the history of institutional publicity that emerged from the French Post Office. As the standard bearer for postal identity for twenty years, institutional publicity helped anchor the transformations of the postal institution in the minds of both its personnel and the public. Juxtaposed with other forms of commercial publicity, institutional publicity upheld and promoted postal products and services from the 1980s onward. The mission of the illustrational publicity for the French Post Office between 1970 and 1990 was to promote the image of the institution and its products.

There were two main phases in the history of institutional publicity for the French Post Office. In the first period, from 1970 to 1981, it was the information and public relations service of the Post and Telegraph Ministry that set up institutional publicity. Thus both entities represented the image of their administration. Although the telecommunications services rarely appeared in institutional publicity until the mid-1970s, the “PTT: les hommes qui relient les hommes” campaign (“We help you connect”) launched in 1979-1980, connected the two entities on the level of institutional publicity. This was a major campaign in the history of postal publicity and marked the beginning of the dissociation within the postal administration. Considered to be an outmoded institution, the post office suffered by comparison with telecommunications services that were rapidly expanding. The board of directors of the post office was faced with the task of creating its own institutional publicity, in other words, its own identity. The new 1986 campaign “Bougez avec la Poste” (Get around with the Post Office!) was a first step in this direction. The novelty of this campaign revolutionized an image of the French Post Office that was decades old. The Post Office had created a label that was a response to the evolutions that presaged the change in postal status that would come about four years later.

How is the history of institutional publicity for the post office atypical? Its difference is related to three main factors: the status of the post office that was governed by an administration until 1991, its relations with telecommunications services within the PTT administration, and finally the transformation of the post office into a financial and business establishment.

These features correspond to the three main areas that institutional communications, broadly defined, emphasized between 1970 and 1990. They are intimately connected and interrelated by definition. The goals of the institutional publicity created by the Post Office to enhance its image were to avoid any stereotypic representation of the French administration, to create its own identity vis-à-vis telecommunications, and to shape the image of a viable business and financial enterprise. The first challenge to the new publicity for the post office as an institution was to counteract and break away from the rather negative image in the minds of the French left over from the 1970s of a broadly-defined administration: its bulk, lack of energy and absence of up-to-date services; there were the major complaints lodged against it. The second challenge, which arose from the confrontation with telecommunications services, would appear particularly around the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. Telecom services were quick to catch up with the

more traditional offerings and were perceived as a modern, energetic institution when compared with the French Post Office. Consequently, “La Poste” had to forge its own newly invigorated identity to compete with telecommunications services. Finally, the third challenge to the French Post Office was the problem of how to shape a new image of a completely commercial and financial enterprise in an increasingly competitive world.