

SWISS Official Stamps for the UNEO and International Agencies

SYNOPSIS FOR: ROPEX 2008

With the establishment of the UN office in Geneva the Swiss PTT (Post, Telephone & Telegraph) provided overprinted versions of some of its issues to be used as official service stamps by the United Nations and some of its special offices in Switzerland. This continued a service provided for the League of Nations. Starting with the October 24, 1955 issue for the United Nations European Office (UNEO) the Swiss PTT created distinct (un-overprinted) stamps for the UNEO and its agencies.

OBJECTIVE & SCOPE

This Traditional exhibit covers the official service stamps, both overprinted Swiss issues and special issues, produced for the United Nations European Office (UNEO) and associated UN agencies with headquarters in Switzerland.

The timeframe begins with the start of operations of the UNEO in 1946 and continues through the issues of 1969. Why stop with 1969? In 1969 the Swiss PTT ceased issuing stamps for the UNEO when the UN began issuing its own postage stamps. Also, the International Education Bureau (IEB) merged with UNESCO, ending that series, as well.

Official stamps issued before the existence of the UN (i.e. for the League of Nations and its agencies) are included when they were used by the UNEO or affiliated agencies during the UN era. The pre-UN era stamps (for the UNEO, IEB and ILO) are identified in the exhibit as “Forerunner” in the sub-heading in the upper right-hand corner of the page.

Even though the International Education Bureau did not become an official agency of the UN until it merged with UNESCO in 1969, it is included in this exhibit because it maintained a very close relationship with the UN since the UN’s inception. One might then think of the entire IEB section as consisting of forerunners.

The scope of this exhibit is intentionally broad, covering the stamps issued for eight separate agencies over a period of roughly 24 years. The agencies for which service stamps were issued and which are covered in this exhibit are:

UNEO - United Nations European Office
ILO - International Labor Organization
IEB - International Education Bureau
WHO - World Health Organization
IRO - International Refugee Organization
WMO - World Meteorological Organization
UPU - Universal Postal Union
ITU - International Telecommunications Union

ORGANIZATION

Following the traditional format, the emphasis of this exhibit is on the stamps: their production, varieties, and use (intended and otherwise). Each international agency is treated in a separate “chapter”, with each agency appearing in the order that its stamps were first issued. The stamps of each agency are presented in a chronological order, by issue or logical grouping of issues (e.g. where stamps show a common design theme).

For each issue or group of issues within a section, first the mint stamps are shown, followed by any varieties and end with examples of usage. Covers are generally shown in ascending face value order, but sometimes adjustments due to the limitations of the exhibit medium require covers to be shown out of order.

Unfortunately, pre-production material for these issues virtually does not exist. If I ever have the opportunity to legally obtain such material, you will see it here!

PRESENTATION

Text is kept to a minimum, allowing the material to “speak for itself”, but providing enough so that even the most casual collector (or non-collector) may follow and enjoy the exhibit. Occasionally, when necessary, a larger amount of text is employed to discuss complicated aspects of the stamps, but this is kept to the minimum. Bold text is used to highlight important information. Italic text is used to differentiate interesting, but auxiliary information. Key items are highlighted by a blue border and may be accompanied by a caption in bold type.

In following the Traditional presentation sequence, the “good stuff” does not always fall within the two middle rows of the frame. Believing that the flow of the story is more important than arranging the material for convenient viewing, I have allowed key items to appear wherever the logically fit.

CHALLENGE

Although modern, these issues present a number of significant collecting challenges. Most of the service stamps were issued in relatively small quantities, some with just a few thousand produced. The low quantities make finding particular plate varieties rather difficult. In some cases only a few hundred copies of a particular variety

potentially exist. Low printing quantities are also reflected in the small number of surviving covers, particularly for the higher values.

Use of service stamps is generally restricted to official correspondence and personal mail of delegates and agency employees. Furthermore, mail franked with service stamps could only be mailed at post offices designated to process agency mail. Many agencies franked the vast majority of their mail with meters or permit imprints.

A variety of postal services (e.g. C.O.D., Return Receipt, Certificate of Mailing) readily seen on public mail bearing contemporary Swiss stamps, are almost unknown on stamped mail of the international agencies.

This exhibit represents the result of almost 30 years of collecting this material from sources around the globe. While the exhibitor is not aware of a formal census of surviving covers, from lengthy experience, official service covers, especially those franked with higher values, are not readily found. Even at the bourse of a major WSP show, one would be lucky to find a few examples.

HIGHLIGHTS

- One of two recorded sets of the 1955-59 UNEO coil strips and examples of all coil stamps on cover.
- Usage of all eight IRO stamps on service covers.
- High-value usages: a pair of the 3F UNEO 1950 issue on cover; a large cover franked with 3F, 5F and 10F (pair) 1944 ILO issue on cover; a strip of the 5F WHO 1950 issue on a parcel card; WHO 1950 3F on cover to China.
- Plate varieties exist for various overprinted stamps. Included in this exhibit are overprint varieties of the 1950 issues for the UNEO, the ILO, the IRO and the IEB. Only 908 sets of each of the IEB varieties are possible. A number of the plate varieties are shown used on cover, as well.
- The discovery copies of the "Footed N" overprint variety of the 3F and 10F 1950 WHO issue, first reported by this exhibitor, are shown. Plate varieties first reported by this exhibitor are also shown for the IRO issue and the 1950 IEB issue.
- The plate blocks for the low-value IRO issue, for which only 480 sets are possible, are shown.
- Very scarce usage as postage due: 50c of the 1959 UNEO issue; WHO issues of 1957 & 1960; ITU issues of 1956 & 1960.

RESEARCH

This material has been keenly scrutinized by both Swiss and UN collectors alike. Detailed listings of the stamps, their varieties and uses can be found in the Zumstein Specialized Catalog or in United Nations Philately (see References). Nevertheless, this exhibitor has discovered

plate varieties of the overprint of the 1950 series of issues. For example, the "foot" on the N of MONDIALE of the 11 low-value WHO 1950 set is well known. This collector has discovered that the variety also exists on the 3F and 10F stamps of that set. New varieties have also been noted for the IEB set and the IRO set.

RECENT CHANGES & ADDITIONS

This exhibit has been completely re-mounted and re-written following an AAPE critique. The vast majority of the stamps are now represented on cover.

The most significant addition has been the acquisition of several IRO service covers from the estate of Ron Ginns (a.k.a. Arleigh Gaines). One or more shown in this exhibit were used to illustrate the IRO section of his catalog. All eight stamps of the set are represented on the covers shown in this exhibit.

REFERENCES

United Nations Philately, Arleigh Gaines, ed., R & D Publications 1980 w/updates through 1997

This massive loose-leaf specialized catalog contains the best English language reference on this material. Sections of interest are: ILO (pp. 1031-1074.2), UNEO (pp. 1075-1106), IEB (pp. 1125-1144), WHO (pp. 1151-1180), UPU (pp. 1181-1205), ITU (pp. 1225-1243), WMO (1251-1258), and IRO (pp. 1301-1310).

For postal rate information, the following German language (with some French) references are excellent:

- *Die Posttaxen der Schweiz ab 1862: Band 1 – Inland*, Kommission für Jugendphilatelie, Zack-Sonderdruck 1990 (Domestic rates)
- *Die Posttaxen der Schweiz ab 1875: Band 2 – Ausland*, Kommission für Jugendphilatelie, Zack-Sonderdruck 1995 (International rates)
- *Die Schweizerischen Flugpost-Zuschlagtaxen ab 1919*, Roland F. Kohl, Postgeschichte-Verlag 1997 (Air Mail rates)