

SWISS Official Stamps for the UNEO and International Agencies

SYNOPSIS for: UNEXPO 2023

OBJECTIVE & SCOPE

This exhibit covers the production and use of the official service stamps, both overprinted Swiss issues and special (un-overprinted) issues, produced by the Swiss Post, Telephone and Telegraph (P.T.T.) 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 (though uses after 1969 may be shown). Why stop with 1969? In 1969 the Swiss P.T.T. 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 non-UN era stamps are identified in the exhibit as “Forerunner” in the sub-heading in the upper right-hand corner of the page. In addition to the forerunners shown for the UNEO, pre-UN issues are also shown for the International Labor Office (ILO) and the IEB, since these agencies existed prior to the formation of the United Nations.

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

TREATMENT

Following the traditional format, the emphasis of this exhibit is on the stamps: their production, varieties, and use. Each international agency is treated in a separate “chapter”, with the stamps of that agency 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. Unfortunately, pre-production material for these issues is not known in the hand of collectors.

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. Important items that do not merit such treatment will be identified by the use of bold text alone.

RARITY

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.

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.

The key to any collection/exhibit of this material is the coil strips of the 1955/59 UNEO issue. This exhibit includes one of the two reported sets of coil strips. Additionally, all four UNEO coil stamps are shown on cover. Coil stamps were also produced for the 5c, 10c and 20c stamps of the 1957 WHO set. While I have yet to acquire the strips, all

WHO coil stamps are shown on cover.

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. **This exhibit includes nearly all of the documented varieties, as well as some discovered by this collector.**

Margin blocks/singles with plate numbers are included for a number of the issues. Most notable are the plate blocks for the low value IRO issues of 1950 for which only 480 sets are possible. The set of stamps issued for use by the IRO were issued in small quantities, and were valid for use for a brief period. Each stamp in the set is shown on official mail covers.

Important to a traditional exhibit is a study of how the stamps were used. This exhibit presents numerous examples of the stamps on cover – the vast majority on official letterhead. Where possible, a solo use of the stamp has been included to show the intended use of that issue. A variety of rates are shown in the exhibit demonstrating how the use of the stamps changed over time along with the rates. The majority of agency mail was sent within Switzerland and to the USA. A number of examples addressed to a wide variety of locations are shown, including covers to many western European countries and to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Israel, Iran, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Congo, South Africa, Indonesia and Shanghai. The vast majority of the stamps are represented on cover.

The high value stamps of the 1950 and forerunner sets (e.g. 1F, 2F, 3F, 5f, and 10F values) are a challenge to find on cover. In most cases, these stamps were used on large envelopes, wrappers or parcel cards. A number of significant covers franked with high-value stamps are presented in this exhibit.

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 enjoys “flyspecking” and 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.

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).

Spezialkatalog Schweiz, Band 2, Zumstein & Cie, 2000 (latest ed.)

The definitive (German language) catalog of Swiss stamps. Sections of interest are: League of Nations (used by UNPA: pp. 944-945), ILO (pp. 954-957), IEB (pp. 961-966), WHO (pp. 967-971), UNEO (pp. 973-978), IRO (pp. 979-980), WMO (pp. 980-981), UPU (pp. 982-983), ITU (p. 985).

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 Jugendphlatelie, Zack-Sonderdruck 1990

Die Posttaxen der Schweiz ab 1875: Band 2 - Ausland, Kommission für Jugendphlatelie, Zack-Sonderdruck 1995

Die Schweizerischen Flugpost-Zuschlagtaxen ab 1919, Roland F. Kohl, Postgeschichte-Verlag 1997