

Electronic Devices To Replace Post Officers

The flood of letters in Germany threatens to deteriorate into a flood catastrophe.

Every day no less than thirty million letters and parcels pass through the postal offices in the Federal Republic of Germany and West-Berlin. This is more than twice as much as only ten years ago, and the number of items carried by the post is still rising rapidly. Personnel to sort these tremendous masses of mail is in very short supply, and robots will have to undertake this work in future.

Automation in the federal post office has progressed to a gratifying degree. Almost all long-distance telephone traffic is already being handled by the self-dialling telephone network. The Federal Republic, moreover, can boast of having the densest telex (private teletyping) network in all the world. An electronic letter sorting machine will relieve the overworked postal

workers of the major part of this terrific amount of work in the near future. In order order to prepare this conversion gradually, the post office robot will soon send its greetings to the eighteen million households in the Federal Republic of Germany, in the form of a booklet containing the new Postal Guide Numbers, as they have been called; numbers which are used as a code characterizing each of the 24,000 post offices in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In Munich and Darmstadt two electronic sorting machines have been installed, which have already been working satisfactorily for some time, and which are the pride of Mr. Stuecklen, the Federal Minister of Postal Affairs and Telecommunication, who is energetically promoting rationalization and automation schemes in the federal German post offices.

The new sorting machine will at first deal within only the first working cycle: All mail items too large or too thick will be separated, and specially packed to be further processed by human effort. All this means that Mr. John Citizen will in future have to use standardized envelopes, and to refrain from putting any quantity into the envelope just to utilize the full postage rate. The robot machine will be able to process letters only up to half an inch thick. The electronic brain of the machine can only read certain figures; therefore, the new Postal Guide Numbers have become necessary.

After preliminary sorting, the letters, without being touched by a human hand, will pass through a machine sorting so that all letters will appear with their addresses up. In order to make this possible, the letter stamps in the Federal Republic of Germany will in the future be of luminescent paper. The first of the stamps are already in print. Over a conveyor line the individual mail units will pass up to the desk of a post official who will attach an invisible magnetic sign to the envelope, corresponding to the postal guide number of the address. But he need not touch any letter by hand.

The last sorting machine will then sort the letters by postal guide numbers. The machine has been designed to be able to manage no less than 20,000 letters every hour.

Every innovation will cost money, in particular so complicated an apparatus as electronic machinery. As the balance sheet of the Federal Post Office last year did no longer show a net earning at the end, the Federal Minister of Postal Affairs has been compelled to announce an increase in postage rates, which roused a storm of protests in the public. Minister Stuecklen replied that he would be ready to restrict the higher postage rates of the post office to those items of mail which were not marked with the new Postal Guide Numbers or which did not correspond to the standardized dimensions.

Another eight to ten years will pass until the 45 major post offices in the Federal Republic of Germany requiring approximately 250 electronic sorting machines will be fully automated. In order to be economical in operation each one of these machines must sort at least 100,000 letters a day. But perhaps, the Federal Post Office will be
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THE COLLEGE . . .

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purnia. But above all, he must be an educational leader. If he cannot, because of his other responsibilities, something's got to give. The solution of "a Damon-and-Pythias relationship to some trusted provost, dean of faculty, or assistant" is, according to Dr. Stoke, "rare and fortuitous." He insists that "the real solution of the problem must wait upon more fundamental institutional evolution." But can we afford to wait that long? Will Dr. Dodd's study point to a quicker way out? The college president cannot, like Pooh-bah, continue to function much longer as Lord High Everything Else. There were no H-bombs in Titipu.

INDIAN WORDS . . .

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mangus) and the cheetah (from the Hindi chita).

A vast army of English words has also been admitted into the Indian languages. Spoken Telegu, for instance, is estimated to contain no less than 3,000. This enrichment of vocabulary and literature has, therefore, been a two-way traffic.

ELECTRONIC . . .

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successful until then to make so much money in other fields of its activity that the citizen will be able to mail his correspondence, which will be electronically sorted, for a postage of still no more than twenty pfennigs.

"They tell me Boobleigh has a childlike faith in his wife."

"Yes, it's wonderful. Why, he even goes so far as to take her word for it when she says there is plenty of gas in their car." — Judge.

* * *

Husband (to wife, over phone): Good news, dear. I'm pretty well played out, tramping all over town, but I've found an apartment at last.

Wife (ecstatically): Oh, Horace, you darling! Do hurry home and tell me all about it.

"There's no great hurry. We don't move in until 1982. The present tenants have a two years' lease." — Life.