

Olivier BATAILLÉ, “The birth of a modern administration: the merger of French post and telegraph services in the 19th century”, (“Naissance d’une administration moderne. La fusion des services postaux et télégraphiques français au XIX^e siècle”), Ph. D. Thesis in contemporary history directed by Philippe Nelidoff, Toulouse 1, 2002, 425 p.

The growing powers of the State in 19th-century France took the form of an increasingly specialized administration. Following this rationale, a new ministerial department was created when an administrative board reached a certain level of importance. Post and telegraph services were part and parcel of this evolution of State services. A study of the merger of these two administrations is indicative of administrative evolution in general in the 19th century: a quantitative development of services, administrative specialization that was reinforced by the creation of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, and the growth of the State’s economic and social jurisdiction.

The merger is a fundamental date in the evolution of post and telegraph services in 19th-c. France. The reform met with strong opposition since it marked at least the partial discontinuation of old fiscal and political policies that governed the affairs of these administrations up to that date. From then on, the way the merged Post and Telegraph services were run basically depended on economic and social concerns. In tandem with the unavoidable reorganization of services, the number of lines and offices was increased. Administrative jurisdiction also grew considerably thanks to the modernization of former services or the creation of new public services in areas as divergent as banking, the transportation of parcels, or telephony.

Although it only came about after long debates and a change of government, the merger of post and telegraph services has demonstrated its importance through the exceptional longevity of the reform: instated in 1878, its was reconsidered for the first time during the 1990 postal reform process.

