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Speech by Trade Minister Ritter V. Bruck

(Proposals for the reform of the letter and carriage post tariff [and the introduction of postage stamps])

1429

HM

YOUR MAJESTY

A few years after the British government, at Rowland Hill's suggestion, had switched from a very high and multi-tiered letter postage rate to the uniform penny postage, Austria was the first of all continental states to undertake a radical reform of its postage rate by abandoning its seven-tiered postage rates up to 14 Kreuzer and, in its place, setting only two postage rates with the regulation of 1842, namely 6 Kreuzer for distances up to and including 10 miles and 12 Kreuzer for distances over 10 miles.

The weight of the simple letter was set at  $\frac{1}{2}$  Loth, the progression in such a way that

from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  Loth the tax by 3 kr

from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 loth the tax by 3 kr

from 1 to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Loth the tax is 6 kr

from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 Loth the tax by 6 kr

from 2 to 4 loth the tax for each 1 loth is 6 kr;

from 4 to 8 Loth the tax for every 2 Loth is 6 kr

from 8 to 16 loth the tax for every 2 loth is 6 kr;

from 16 Loth 5 pi the tax for every 8 Loth rose by 6 kr.

However, even when this regulation was announced, the public was explicitly informed that the two new postage rates were intended only to form the transition to a single, uniform postage rate throughout the Austrian monarchy. Since the first rate of 6 kr proved too high, the area for the 6 kr postage rate was expanded from 10 to 20 miles as early as 1843. In 1848, since the excessive rate had not yet been eliminated, a postage rate of 3 kr was introduced for distances of up to 10 miles. Finally, in 1849, further relief for postal traffic was granted by expanding the area for the 6 kr rate from 20 to 30 miles. The latter measure was adopted as a transitional and conciliatory measure with regard to the principle of a single uniform postage rate, established in 1842, a principle whose implementation the Minister of Commerce in his position had to constantly keep in mind. The most loyal Minister of Commerce felt all the more compelled to do so since Austria had already been overtaken in this regard by Russia in 1843, which throughout its colossal empire established a uniform rate of 10 silver kopecks for a single letter weighing 1 Russian loth.

On January 1, 1849, France also introduced a uniform postage rate of 20 centimes (4.5 kr) for a single 7.5-gram letter, and Belgium followed suit with rates of 10 and 20 centimes, depending on whether the letters were franked or not. In all of these countries, the reduction and simplification of the postage rate went hand in hand with the introduction of the postage stamp and franking using the stamp.

The latter is currently being implemented in the neighbouring state of Bavaria.

The most loyal Minister of Commerce could not justify Austria continuing to lag behind the most civilized states of Europe. Therefore, after having had the matter carefully considered by a meeting of experts, and considering the situation in the aforementioned countries and the undeniable simplification of handling inherent in the use of letter stamps, he takes the liberty of proposing the adoption of the principle that letter franking by means of saleable and affixed stamps should be introduced in Austria as well. Franking by means of letter stamps, however, is conditional upon the greatest possible simplification of rates and progression, a requirement which the current postage rates clearly do not meet.

As for the unit of weight, the Viennese loth is the simplest and most acceptable, since it is on average closest to the units long in use abroad, is appropriate to our circumstances, where the finest paper is by no means generally used for letters, and, finally, it almost entirely agrees with the standard weight adopted by Austria at the postal conferences held in Dresden, and would have been implemented throughout the German federal territory if the events of 1848 had not prevented the previously agreed-upon reconvening of the conference. Just as the loth is the most appropriate unit of

weight, the stamping of letters by the parties cannot be combined with any other weight progression than the one from loth to loth for the simple postage rate.

As for the amount of the postage rate itself, it hardly needs to be discussed that Austria's cultural and commercial conditions do not permit a return to the original rate of 3 kr, and thus the actual penny postage throughout the entire monarchy. Equally, however, it would not be appropriate to abandon the 3 kr rate and generally introduce a higher rate instead. The public would rightly recognize this as a step backward, and it would simply again open up unreasonable scope for letter smuggling. The same reservations would prevail, to a greater extent, against universally replacing the 6 kr rate with the 12 kr rate. Under these circumstances, and since on the one hand this is a simplification imperatively demanded by the introduction of the letter stamp, and, on the other hand, merely a further step in fulfilling a promise made to the public seven years ago, the most loyal Minister of Commerce, with the approval of the Council of Ministers, feels obliged to propose the complete abolition of the 12 kr tax rate and the establishment of a postage rate of two rates: 3 kr up to and including 10 miles and 6 kr over 10 miles, to which would be added the rate of 2 kr for Vienna city letters. In this alone, the public would see a decisive reform, a significant facilitation of their letter traffic, a decisive concession in the area of the postal service; but in all other means of information, he would see only half-measures. The most loyal Minister of Commerce is far from concealing from himself that the abolition of the 12 kr rate will, at least initially, result in a not inconsiderable financial loss. But in all countries where a similar measure has been taken, and where postage rates have not been raised to an almost fabulous height, as was formerly the case in England, experience has shown that the increase in correspondence has within a short time compensated for the financial decline.

There is every reason to expect a similar result in Austria, which has been reborn through the efforts of its well-intentioned citizens and is moving with force towards a bright future, and the most loyal Minister of Trade believes that the above discussions have all the more certainly justified his proposal, since with such a reduction in postage, the financial shortfall in revenue will under all circumstances find a very significant and not insignificant counterweight in the associated increase and revitalization of intellectual and commercial family traffic.

The most faithful Minister of Commerce now passes to the second part of the task before him, the postal tariff.

Even a cursory glance at paragraphs 33 to 57 of the postage regulations of 1842 shows the imperfection of the existing provisions in a very striking way.

The imposition of a quadruple fee for value, weight, recommendation, and letter postage; the necessity of including the fee for the unconditional liability assumed by the post office for insurance postage in these fees; and finally, the effort to establish a balance between the letter and carriage mail rates in order to prevent the fraudulent use of carriage mail to the detriment of the rate, have brought a truly rare complexity and confusion into the carriage mail tariff. Moreover, the modifications and exceptions contained in the relevant provisions of the regulation are so numerous that the complex of these provisions could well be described as a simultaneous repeal of the law of which they are a part.

The shipments are subject to different, but by no means uniform, postage treatment not only according to their value, weight and distance, but also according to their contents, depending on whether money and securities representing money, gold, silver, copper coins, goods, documents and printed matter, books, etc. are being sent. Consequently, the complication is such that not only is self-assessment by the parties and the corresponding control of the officials out of the question, but even the latter are not in a position to assess the mail consignments without the aid of five large tables.

The effects of the postal tariff are sometimes bizarre. To give just a few examples, 1200 pounds weight, when sent 60 miles as parcels pay:

1 pound	880 fl
3 pounds	533 fl 20 kr
5 pounds	464 fl
10 pounds	340 fl
20 pounds	260 fl
30 pounds	221 fl 20 kr
50 pounds	183 fl 12 kr
100 pounds	134 fl 48 kr

100,000fl in banknotes, sent to the same distance as letters pay:

100 fl	616 fl 40 kr
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500 fl	293 fl 20 kr
100 fl	241 fl 40 kr
500 fl	199 fl 20 kr
10,000 fl	194 fl 10 kr
100,000 fl	189 fl 25 kr

Thus, the tariff conspicuously favours large shipments at the expense of small ones, which has already provoked loud complaints not only from the public in general but also from the trade in particular. The urgent need for reform in this area is therefore obvious. Despite the considerable complexity of the travel post tariff, postage for travel post in 1847 amounted to a total of 1,250,000 Gulden, more than half of the post office's net income of roughly 2,120,000 Gulden.

Nor is this a matter of simplification and simplicity, as is the case with letter post rates, but primarily of the latter, so that each party can easily assess their own shipment and thus control the official. It is all the less a question of reducing the fees, since the transport of carriage mail is not subject to state reservation but is open to everyone. Therefore, anyone who prefers the post office for its greater punctuality and unconditional liability may also be willing to pay the higher fee.

It is a matter of a more even distribution of the postage burden and of not making it too easy to send mail over short distances, where the public has almost as much access to private matters, and not making it too difficult over long distances, where the public is more dependent on the post office. It is a matter of diverting small and light mail from the post office and, as far as possible, the freight of bulky and heavy mail away from it.

Based on all these considerations, numerous calculations were made and tariffs drafted, but finally, the current postal tariff was agreed upon, which immediately stands out for its clarity, simplicity, and comprehensiveness. According to this, 100 florins in value and 1 pound in weight are kept equal; the rate increases by 1 kronen per 100 Gulden in value and 1 pound in weight, namely up to 50 miles by 5 to 5; from 50 miles to 100 miles by 10 to 10; and over 100 miles by 20 to 20 miles

The recommendation and letter fees would be replaced by a uniform, fixed basic postage rate of 10 kr per item, regardless of value, weight, or distance. The relationship between the previous rate and the new rate is clear from the examples presented in the attached overview, which also show that there is absolutely no reason to fear a significant loss of postage from the new postal rate. In light of the above, the most loyal Minister of Commerce believes he needs no further justification for proposing the adoption of this new postal rate, which, without threatening the finances with a loss of revenue, must clearly bring great relief to traffic.

At the end, he allows himself only to briefly summarize all his proposals approved by the Council of Ministers:

- 1) Franking of letters by means of adhesive stamps should be introduced generally, including in the city post office in Vienna and other places.
- 2) The details of the implementation of this measure with regard to the quality, use and wear of the stamps, their rendering un reusable as well as the fair compensation of the postmasters who are paid postage shares should be left to the most faithful Minister of Commerce.
- 3) For letter mail, the postage would be fixed at 3 kr up to and including 10 miles, and 6 kr for a single letter over 10 miles. The city postage in Vienna remains fixed at 2 kr.
- 4) The weight of the simple letter would be 1 Loth Viennese weight and the tax progression would be determined so that for each Loth of additional weight the tax for the simple letter would be levied again.
- 5) Items without value must be sent by letter post up to a weight of 6 Loth. Items weighing more than 6 Loth can be sent by letter post or by carriage post; however, in the latter case, you must pay the standard carriage post rate plus the postage for a letter weighing 7 Loth until processing according to the carriage post rate results in a higher postage amount.
- 6) All shipments with a declared value, regardless of their weight, are considered carriage mail.
- 7) The basic postage of 10 kr would be charged on each individual shipment, regardless of weight, value or distance.
- 8) For parcels without a stated value, the valuation is based solely on the weight, but for parcels with a stated value, the valuation is based on both the value and the weight.
- 9) A declared value of less than 50 fl remains free of value postage; only from 50 fl onwards does the value form

an element of the assessment.

- 10) Valuable items weighing less than 6 loth must pay, in addition to the basic postage, the letter rate based on the weight, and only if the handling according to the carriage post rate results in a higher postage, the latter.
- 11) Valuable items weighing more than 6 Loth are subject to the letter rate of 7 Loth in addition to the basic postage until the rate is higher according to the postal tariff.
- 12) If a money shipment contains a letter weighing more than 1 Loth, the excess weight shall be subject to the postage due according to the letter postage rate.
- 13) All postage moderations and exceptions for writings and documents, gold and silver money, paper money, valuables, books, brochures, musical scores, poultry, fish and oysters must cease; only for raw silk will a postage limitation be retained, which, however, will be specially and differently determined for the individual places of posting in South Tirol and the Lombardy-Venetian kingdoms.
- 14) All provisions of the Postage Regulations of 1842 not repealed or modified by the above provisions shall remain in force.
- 15) In order to enable the public to carry out the assessment of their own mail, not only the mail tariff but also the mileage scale of the place must be kept for sale in all larger postal towns, and in smaller postal towns, both must be displayed in the post office for easy viewing by the public.

In agreement with the Council of Ministers, the most faithful Minister of Commerce therefore takes the liberty of enclosing the draft of the most high resolution which Your Majesty may deign to issue in response to the present most humble submission.

*These proposals for the reform of the letter and postal -  
tariffs receive my approval.*

*Schönbrunn, September 25, 1849.*

*Franz Joseph M.P.*

*v. Bruck M.P.*

*Vienna, September 14, 1849.*