

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

62nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference

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The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was founded by William Randal Cremer, MP for Haggerston from 1885, and Frédéric Passy, deputy for the 8th District of Paris in the French National Assembly from 1881. Cremer was born in Fareham, Wiltshire on 18 March 1838; deserted by her husband, his mother Harriet brought him up in great poverty and saw to his education. After apprenticeship to a carpenter he went to London in 1852 and became involved in trade unionism and franchise reform. By 1871 he was a leading international figure in working-class politics; in that year, due to the Franco-German war, he founded the Workmen's Peace Association (later renamed the International Arbitration League) and remained its Secretary until his death. Passy, born in Paris on 20 May 1822, came from a wealthy Norman family whose members distinguished themselves in learning and public service for several generations. An academic by vocation, he was prominent from 1867 onwards as a firm but moderate liberal, a wholehearted republican, but above all as a campaigner for the solution of international disputes by peaceful mediation. Like Cremer, his activities as a pacifist were further focused by the Franco-German War.

Cremer embraced pacifism in 1866 after distancing himself from the increasingly revolutionary complexion of international trade unionism; Passy first refused all office under the Second Empire as a protest at Napoleon III's unconstitutional seizure of power, and then as a political figure after 1871 criticised colonialism and socialism with equal fervour. Passy first won his Parisian seat by a majority of only 44, and lost it in 1889; Cremer lost his Haggerston seat in 1895 by only 31 votes, although he regained it in 1900. Cremer, although he survived two wives, was childless; Passy fathered twelve children.

During 1887-88 various differences came to a head between Britain, France and the USA; during the ensuing flurry of activity in which petitions were presented to governments and visits exchanged between national delegations, Cremer and Passy met and found each other totally agreed on the importance of collective parliamentary action to establish arbitration treaties between the three nations. In a climate of growing sympathy for this shared aim, an Inter-Parliamentary Conference was held at the Hôtel Continental in Paris on 29 and 30 June 1889; attended by 55 French, 28 British and 5 Italian delegates plus one each from Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Liberia, Spain and the USA, it resolved among other things to reconvene yearly hosted by one of the member nations.

This marked the birth of the IPU, although the term 'Union' was not used until the end of the century; the achievements it helped bring about in its early years include the Hague Peace Conference of 1899 and the International Court of Justice. Passy received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901; after his death on 12 June 1912 he was called the 'Apostle of Peace'. Cremer was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1903; among many other honours in his final years, he was given a knighthood in 1907, after first refusing it in 1906. Sir William Randal Cremer died on 22 July 1908.

By the 1970s the aims of the IPU had evolved: 'To promote personal contacts between members of all Parliaments, constituted into National Groups, and to unite them in common action to secure and maintain the full participation of their respective States in the firm establishment and development of representative institutions and in the advancement of the work of international peace and co-operation.' It operated on a strictly non-governmental basis and represented the entire political spectrum and all systems that could claim some form of permanent representative assembly, whether legislative or merely consultative. This proviso was first framed so that, for example, members of the Duma in autocratic Imperial Russia were eligible to join. At the end of 1974 the British Group was one of over 70 that made up the IPU worldwide; it comprised 194 members of the House of Lords, 540 MPs, and 86 Associate Members. Though neither its work nor even existence were widely known to the public, its President was the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and its Vice-Presidents included two former Prime Ministers, Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Edward Heath.

ISSUE FIRST SUGGESTED

On 31 October 1972 John Hall, MP, Chairman of the British Group, wrote to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Sir John Eden. He advised that the next IPU conference to be held in London (the fifth to do so) would take place in September 1975, adding 'It has been the practice in the past for the host country ... to issue a special commemorative stamp, and I know this would be expected of us ... I think the earliest

possible notice is desirable. The Executive Committee of the British Group, which will be organising the Conference, would be very grateful for your help in authorising the issue of such a stamp ... I would be glad to discuss the details of the stamp with the appropriate experts.'

Sir John replied on 8 November that he had passed the request to the Post Office for 'sympathetic consideration'; the Managing Director (Posts) (MDP), A Currall, wrote further on 20 November promising such consideration, but warning 'We receive a great many requests of a similar nature for special stamps of which only a few can be met.' On 27 November Brigadier M J A Paterson, Secretary of the British Group, replied 'all host countries over many years have issued a commemorative stamp ... it would be especially invidious for the British Parliament, as hosts in 1975, to break this tradition, particularly as it is one of the two Co-founders of the Union'.

The IPU Conference was listed for consideration by the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) in autumn 1973, along with many other suggestions for the 1975 stamp programme: however, it was dismissed as a possibility without recorded discussion. Neither did it catch the attention of any of the regional directors when canvassed for their views. Its subsequent absence from the stamp programme went without protest until 12 August 1974, when the MDP wrote to the British Group's Chairman (since the previous March, W T Williams MP) regretting that the 1975 programme was now finalised without it having been possible to include an issue marking the Conference:

There are severe constraints which limit both the number of special issues and the number of commemorative stamps we can put on sale in a year ... We have to omit many important subjects which we would otherwise include simply because we cannot make room for them all.

Currall suggested a slogan postmark campaign or special handstamp as an alternative.

REJECTION OF PROPOSAL

Mr Williams replied on 15 August:

I must confess that I am a little distressed ... The Inter-Parliamentary Union is one of the oldest international organisations in the world (surpassed only by the Universal Postal Union) ... Every country in the world which has hosted the Annual Conference has always had a special stamp issued to commemorate the event. There are now 74 countries affiliated of whom at least 70 I expect to be represented ... The Queen is we hope opening the Conference ceremonially ... The whole thing is a very big affair of considerable importance ... It would

be extremely regrettable if Great Britain the founder member of the Union did not do at least as well as every other country has done as hosts.

Not all Mr William's arguments were strictly correct; the International Telecommunication Union was older than either the UPU or IPU, having been founded in 1865 (the Post Office had marked its centenary with two special stamps). Neither was it the case that host countries invariably issued stamps for IPU conferences; a December 1972 survey of IPU issues since 1950 showed that host nations had omitted to do so in 1952-54, 1956, 1963-64, and 1967-68 (Eire, Switzerland, USA, Austria, Thailand, Yugoslavia, Denmark, USSR and Peru). A further letter to Williams on 2 September from D Wesil, the Senior Director (Services), reiterated the Post Office's apologies at having to disappoint the British Group, and proposed a further alternative, that the Philatelic Bureau supply them with 1973 Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference stamps - the Group could if it wished produce commemorative covers and affix these stamps to them. The only snag was that the stamps were due to be withdrawn from sale in ten days.

Brigadier P S Ward, now Secretary of the British Group, explained in a telephone conversation on 7 September that the proposal was unacceptable since the IPU Conference was a worldwide event and thus took precedence over the Commonwealth Conference. He reluctantly accepted the reasons why it was not possible to issue stamps, but warned that the Group would probably not be satisfied.

PRESSURES TO ACCEPT ISSUE

During the ensuing months 'anguished negotiations', as Williams later described them, took place outside the Post Office: these did not, however, come to its attention until February 1975. On 18 February E G White, Director of Marketing and chairman of the SAC, wrote to the MDP; he had heard from D M Elliott, the Department of Trade and Industry representative on the SAC, that the Secretary of State for Industry had met Williams the previous week. The Secretary of State, Anthony Wedgwood-Benn, MP, was not only a former Postmaster General but also the minister currently responsible for postal affairs. It was reported that 'although the Secretary of State defended our position, he was unable to close the subject and that there might be fresh representation from the Foreign Secretary'.

White felt that following such representation it would be a satisfactory and practical solution to issue a single stamp at one of the airmail values; this could be released between the Railways issue (13 August) and Jane Austen (8 October). A single higher value stamp need not be produced in such large quantities as to disrupt existing production schedules at Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, and might also prove remunerative on first day covers. The artist Richard Downer had already produced designs of the Palace of

Westminster for the 1973 Commonwealth Conference stamps; he was known to be a quick worker and could probably produce a suitable adaptation of these in a very short time.

Nevertheless he considered that there might be practical value in an approach on the lines of 'Exceptionally on this occasion we will do what you ask but please stop making unreasonable and untimely demands.' The points he thought might be taken up included: the extended arguments with Benn postponing his pressure for a 1975 issue celebrating Trades Unions until the following year, which had delayed announcement of the programme to the detriment of the Post Office's commercial interest; the prospect of a similar battle over an issue for the American Bicentennial in 1976 ('I would far sooner concede the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1975 if this is the price for immunity in 1976'); and the dangerous though not unprecedented practice of introducing a new issue after the Minister had agreed the final programme.

The MDP's thoughts were that he was reluctant to go back on a decision made a year previously, and that the Commonwealth Conference stamps had been too recent to justify an issue on similar lines. In the event, however, the more confrontational approach suggested by White was eschewed. On 6 March he advised the SAC that if Benn asked for an IPU Conference issue it would be a matter for the Post Office Board, since it had approved the original programme. His main concern was to see that as much timely preparation as possible was made so as not to prejudice any decision - Richard Downer had already been asked to design the proposed issue. He repeated his view that the issue would be most feasible if confined to a single higher value stamp, and explained that production and operational problems would have to be overcome, chiefly because the Railways issue, less than four weeks before the start of the Conference, could not now be rescheduled. On the same day Eric Ogden (an SAC member and the Labour MP for West Derby) was able to supply White with briefing material on the IPU via his parliamentary contacts.

POST OFFICE AGREEMENT

On 14 March the Secretary of State wrote to the Post Office Chairman, Sir William Ryland, that the Foreign Secretary had now asked him personally if the Post Office might reconsider its position on an IPU Conference issue. Benn reminded Sir William of the previous year's decision:

You found that you were not able to adopt this particular suggestion. I did myself give careful consideration as to whether your proposed omission of it from the 1975 stamp series was acceptable but in view of the other claims for the limited space available I acknowledged that it was one which might be left out and agreed the programme accordingly.

He now believed that it would be 'most regrettable' if a suitable stamp issue was not released; the Foreign Secretary, in addition to those points made previously about other countries' IPU issues and Britain's status as co-founder, had noted that the organisation did not often hold its conferences in Britain (the last had been in 1957, and had also been the occasion of a stamp issued in haste). He considered that the failure to take advantage of such a rare opportunity 'would attract criticism both here and overseas and that it would therefore be in the interests of our relations with the Governments of other countries if the Post Office were to issue such a stamp ... Whilst I recognise the difficulties I should be most grateful if you would agree to issue a suitable stamp at the appropriate time.' The Queen was open the conference, to take place from 4 to 12 September.

The Chairman replied on 21 March that it should be within available production capacity to issue a 12p stamp for the IPU Conference, hopefully on 3 or 4 September. He added 'it is not very easy to change a programme at such short notice', although an earlier draft had explained in some detail the Post Office's antipathy in principle to changing an established programme:

From a design viewpoint, we can programme to give design quality within the year and have adequate time to secure design quality. In operating, we can plan production and supply economically. In marketing, both we and the trade interests which also promote philately are given knowledge ahead to plan effectively. From a public relations standpoint, we avoid a running argument with the many contenders for places in the programme, who may continue representations to us - and perhaps to you - if they feel our decision is less than final.

Despite these arguments, however, it was found expedient to accede to Benn's wishes with only minimal protest.

DESIGN WORK

On 24 March the Post Office Design Director Stuart Rose and the artist Richard Downer handed the latter's IPU stamp design over to Harrisons; the aerial view of the Palace of Westminster originated as a design produced but not used for Downer's Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference stamps of two years earlier. Next day Rose confirmed to Harrisons that the company might proceed with essaying and that Downer would supply lettering for the caption and value '12p'. It was decided on 25 March that the inscription read 'Inter-Parliamentary Union 1975', and on 26 March to issue the stamp on 3 September rather than the opening day of the Conference on 4 September; the reason was that 3 September was a Wednesday, a relatively quiet day on which the minimum disruption to non-philatelic customers might be expected, and thus the day on which new stamps were customarily issued. R K Worth of the Council of Post Office Unions (COPOU) was informed by

Postal Marketing of its preference for 3 September, and asked for his comments; he was told that 4 September was not ruled out, but that there would be no point in any later issue date. Meanwhile sales of the Railways issue released on 13 August would not be curtailed in any way, as it was expected to be very popular. Worth replied on 14 April that COPOU was agreeable to the issue date of 3 September.

It was decided as early as 26 March that the issue should be accompanied by a first day envelope and presentation pack; text of approximately 750 words for the pack and 200 for the envelope filler card was commissioned from the writer Alan Martin Harvey on 4 April at a fee of £50. Richard Downer was asked on 21 April to design the envelope and pack, at a fee for the former of £35 for rough designs plus £40 on completion, and £50 for rough designs plus £65 on completion for the pack; the following day he was also formally offered £150 for the stamp design he had already produced, plus £150 if finally issued. At the end of May it was decided that there should be a special Philatelic Bureau handstamp for the first day of issue, and Downer was commissioned on 4 June to design this (£10 rough designs plus £15 on completion). His first design, showing Randal Cremer and Frédéric Passy was rejected with the comment 'portraits on handstamps are unacceptable'; he replaced this with a design based on the Gothic arches of Westminster Hall, where the Conference was to open.

It had been hoped in mid-April that the essays could be approved by early May so that Harrisons could start preparation of cylinders for the estimated 100,000 sheets of stamps. The probability was noted on 18 April that there would be no time to secure the Queen's approval of the essays before production began, and thus the risk that she would require changes might have to be taken. At this point the essays were imminently expected, but in the event Harrisons did not supply them until 1 May. It had already emerged that changes would have to be made when the Chairman and Secretary of the British Group were briefed on the issue at the end of April. There was no substantial objection to Alan Martin Harvey's text and W T Williams stated in a letter of 29 April: 'I really am most grateful ... It is entirely in line with what happens in other countries'; however, both Williams and Brigadier Ward took exception to the proposed caption. After discussion with Miss Kit Parkyn of Postal Marketing on 30 April, Brigadier Ward wrote to Peter Shrives, Post Office Design Co-ordinator, the following day:

A vague statement, mentioning the year and the Inter-Parliamentary Union itself, entirely misses the point. It is surely the combination of the title of the Conference and the place and date of the frank which makes the whole thing of interest, and commemorative value ... The stamp itself should bear the inscription: '62nd Inter-Parliamentary Conference'.

ESSAYS SUPPLIED BY PRINTERS

Harrison's first essays showed the 12p value and the criticised caption. Stuart Rose told the SAC that the caption change as requested had been agreed when the essays were shown to the Committee on 8 May, and that Richard Downer would be present while this was done. The meeting approved the design subject to the 'Committee Room' roof being darker and the contrast between the roofs and remainder of the buildings reduced generally, the parapet on the bridge shown more clearly (possibly in white) and the new caption to be more legible. On 12 May an essay was submitted to the Post Office chemists for testing as to whether the design would produce an acceptable signal, from phosphor as bars or overall, with facing equipment. The essay was satisfactory, while it was not anticipated that the intended changes would have an adverse effect.

As late as 16 May it was planned that the IPU stamp should be printed in a combination of photogravure and intaglio; the initial intention had been that Harrisons should exploit the capabilities of its 'Jumelle' machine to print all special issues for the second half of 1975 in this way. After serious problems with the Sailing stamps to be issued in June, however, this idea was abandoned, and on 4 June it was announced that the IPU issue would be solely in photogravure.

On 12 June Harrisons supplied new essays, in the 20p value. On enquiry the printers reported that 20p was used on revised artwork supplied by Downer, and could only speculate as to how this error had arisen - it had always been intended that the stamp be 12p, and this was confirmed on 13 June. No solution to this anomaly is recorded in the files. Harrisons was told on 17 June that Downer would send a new overlay for the correct value. In other respects the essays were satisfactory, and specimens were forwarded to the MDP and Chairman on 19 June with the explanation that the value would be corrected before the stamps were printed. On 24 June the MDP forwarded an essay to the Secretary of State; it was in turn submitted to Buckingham Palace on 30 June and returned approved by the Queen the following day.

In the meantime Harrisons supplied a final set of 12p essays on 23 June. Two sample sheets of the stamps followed on 25 June, and six more the next day. The stamps were subsequently produced in bulk without problems; a decision on 17 July that the following issue, the Jane Austen stamps, should be put back from 8 to 22 October was partly ascribed to unspecified 'production difficulties' with the IPU stamp, but in fact arose from political concern over the timing of the autumn tariff increase. On 22 July the IPU stamp was announced at a press preview, the accompanying release having the spelling of Passy's name as 'Frederick Passey', a mistake which the Director of Marketing hastened to assure IPU officials was not duplicated in the first day envelope or presentation pack.

IPU STAMP ISSUED

The IPU Conference 12p was issued as scheduled on 3 September 1975. The stamps were printed on unwatermarked paper with all-over phosphor in sheets of 100, in light new blue, black and brownish-grey, with the Queen's head in gold. Sales when the stamp was finally withdrawn a year later were recorded as 5,770,000; although the minimum airmail letter rate to Zone C (Australasia and the Far East) went up from 12p to 13p on 27 September, this should not have unduly affected sales as no 13p special stamps were issued for another month, and no 13p definitives until 1979.

The stamp was reviewed as 'dismal' by 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' for September 1975 - the article continued:

It is an incredibly dull and dreary stamp - the Thames a murky blue and the foreground ... literally sand or drab in colour. The buildings are foreshortened into insignificance, and Westminster Bridge leads the eye out of the picture in disconcerting fashion. Presumably time did not permit the engraving of the fine lines which would have meant all the difference, but there can be no excuse for not using the famous and familiar river-front view of the 'Mother of Parliaments.'

Apart from the official Philatelic Bureau handstamp, the IPU also sponsored its own handstamp, available in black or blue at the Royal Festival Hall, where most of the Conference programme took place, and a commemorative cover was also made available; this facility was provided from 2 to 13 September, as two days of preliminary meetings preceded assembly of the full Conference on 4 September. A commemorative handstamp was first suggested to the British Group by the Director of Marketing as a solution to its concern that the Bureau's 'first day of issue' handstamp would not be available for the official opening on 4 September. No others were used on the day of issue that bore any connection to the IPU Conference, although 'The Story of a Cathedral Exhibition' was in use at Canterbury from 24 July to 23 October, and 'Stockton & Darlington Railway 1825-1975' at Darlington from 15 August to 13 September. Ordinary circular datestamps from 3 September for the House of Commons, House of Lords, and Parliament Street Branch Office (all London SW1) were appropriate.

Sales of first day covers and packs are not recorded, but 560,000 envelopes with filler cards and 130,000 packs were produced. A further 3,000 envelopes inscribed 'souvenir covers' were also ordered. The actual total of first day envelope requisitions was 558,800 compared with 524,500 for the European Architectural Heritage issue and 521,500 for Sailing. On 8 August it was noted that 80,000 of the first day envelopes delivered to date bore pinchmarks or were badly folded, although the standard was not as poor as that of the

Railways covers produced by the same printers, Taylowe Ltd; it was decided on 17 September that the firm would not be used again.

Initially it was doubted whether producing a presentation pack for a single-stamp issue was worthwhile: recent examples such as the Trees issues of 1973-74 having produced little revenue, while comparably low sellers such as the packs for 1972's Broadcasting Anniversaries, or the British Explorers, County Cricket and Commonwealth Conference sets of 1973, had been more profitable because they included more stamps. However, it was decided to maintain the practice of issuing a presentation pack for each new special issue as this had now been done since the Post Office Technology issue of October 1969 onwards (except for the Charity stamp issued at the beginning of 1975).

THE STAMP'S DESIGNER

Richard Downer was paid £300 for his accepted stamp design on 5 June; in October he was paid the agreed £190 for designing the first day envelope and presentation pack, and £25 for the pictorial handstamp, plus £8 for the design and layout of the envelope filler card and £43.95 covering 'repro type setting for all items' and 'neg and prints'. All these are exclusive of VAT, added at the then standard 8%.

Downer was born in 1933 and attended Leeds College of Art. He was first employed as an advertising visualiser in 1953 and became a freelance designer, typographer and illustrator in 1965. In 1955 he was author of the book 'Drawing Designs'. At the time of the IPU stamp issue and conference he was chiefly engaged in designing corporate identity programmes. As well as the IPU and Commonwealth Conference stamps he designed the 1975 Christmas issue; he also worked on stamp designs for the Westminster Abbey (1966), Christmas 1969, Rural Architecture (1970) and European Elections (1979) issues.

GILES ALLEN
13 December 1996

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