

MEMORANDUM FOR CABINET BY THE MINISTER OF
TRADE, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE

Accommodation of Department of Posts at Auberge d'Italie

Hon Ministers will recall that some years ago Government had decided that, following the transfer of the Superior Courts to their new premises in Kingsway the Auberge d'Italie would be used to house the Department of Posts and Telephones. The spear-head of this project was the building of the new Parcel Post Office, at considerable public expense, on a site contiguous to the Auberge d'Italie on its South Street side so as to be easily connected with the Auberge premises when the Department moves in. The vital need of easy carriage of mails was also kept in mind and, as part of the long-term project, advantage was taken of the different levels of the streets so as to provide at the new Parcel Post Office a separate entrance for mails that would avoid congestion at the main public entrance in Merchants Street, at the same time facilitating the loading and unloading of mails.

2. Since then my Ministry has always understood that, having regard to the expanded activities and services of the Department and to the great inconvenience being experienced by both Staff and Public in its present unsuitable premises, it was only a question of time before the full implementation of the policy agreed upon would be fulfilled and the Department transferred to the Auberge d'Italie.

3. This line of policy in fact goes back to 1943, when the then Postmaster General had submitted a scheme for adapting the Auberge d'Italie as a Post Office, providing facilities for the transaction of all business usually connected with a Post Office. Its spacious ground floor and its ideal siting in the vicinity of the two bus termina and near to the Barracca Lift were considered as a major advantage that might lead Government to opt for the conversion of the Auberge rather than for the building of a new Post Office. The Postmaster General's project was discussed by the Reconstruction Committee on the 20th July 1943 and it was generally agreed that the plan had many points to commend itself. However, other steps were then taken and the Post Office continued to be housed in Palazzo Parisio.

4. My Ministry has recently ascertained that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism are planning to have this Auberge converted so as to house the Archaeology Section of the Museum, and that the Auberge de Provence, which is at present used as the National Museum, whilst continuing to be the home of the Art. Section, will house the next International Exhibition to be staged by the Council of Europe in Malta in 1970 on the theme "The Order of St. John of Jerusalem". I understand that for this purpose instructions have been issued to the Museum Authorities to prepare plans showing the proposed distribution of the archaeological exhibits in the various halls at the Auberge d'Italie and the structural or other alterations that it would be necessary to carry out as soon as the Superior Courts move out to their new premises.

5. This Ministry is not aware that there has ever been a change in policy regarding the eventual transfer of the Department of Posts to the Auberge d'Italie. My Ministry has for a long time been very much concerned over the imperative need of improving the standard and services provided by the Department of Posts as well as the Welfare and accommodation facilities of the other Departments assigned to it. I have had occasion to observe for myself that accommodation left much to be desired at the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, at the General Post Office and at the Water Works Department and that most of the Staff were working under unhygienic conditions.

6. My Ministry is at the moment studying the problem of improving the accommodation in these Departments on the assumption that the Auberge d'Italie would be available for use as a Post Office, thus making it possible to effect a re-distribution of the accommodation between the other two Departments.

7. The improvement of the Postal Services and of the accommodation available for the above three Departments is considered of paramount importance and my Ministry very strongly feels that there is no case for a reversal of Government policy in this respect.

8. In the circumstances Hon Ministers are requested to confirm that the Auberge d'Italie would be available to house the Department of Posts and Telephones on its being vacated by the Superior Courts. Early confirmation would enable this Ministry to carry on with its planned re-distribution of accommodation between its other departments.

30th November, 1966
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