

1959: the birth of the CERN Courier

When **Roger Anthoine** stepped out of CERN administration's "Norwegian" barrack (now building 553) on 1 May 1959, little did he know that he was entering into an editorial and public relations venture that would still be thriving over half a century later.

The story of *CERN Courier* all began about a year earlier when an advertisement in the Belgian press mentioned that a international research organization based in Geneva was going to start its own periodical. It was intended to be an internal public-relations gesture meant to inform its staff of what was going on within its premises. The organization's acronym, CERN, meant little, to say nothing, to the average reader – this writer included. Nevertheless, some months later he found himself the new member of the organization's diminutive Public Information Office. Here he was endowed with the task of initiating a publication that reflected the high motivation of a staff dedicated towards building and operating a couple of large "atom-smashing" accelerators.

The job was a typical public-relations venture aimed at fewer than 900 souls, which may nowadays seem mild and benign compared with the complexity of today's communication assignments. Still, the task featured several aspects that had to be addressed by a newcomer in a foreign environment. This was to be carried out within an organization that, for all its culture of openness, was far from familiar with disseminating its doings in simple terms.

Questions first

Among the challenges to be resolved, the most prominent was: what support could be expected from management? Fortunately, this proved to be just an academic question because the project was the brainchild of Cornelis Bakker. As director-general, his ideas on the subject were not challenged by his administration.

Then, among the practical problems, one had to secure a budget, which meant coaxing the finance office (FO) into allocating the odd sum. In fact, the amount was small enough that it could not be found recently in the FO's archives. Fortunately the princely figure of SFr 7200 a year has surfaced out of this writer's notes from the time. No need then, to wonder why the inclusion of paying advertisements in an international house publication was also first invented at CERN. This "invention", although not quite as resounding as that of Tim Berners-Lee 30 years later (*CERN Courier* May 2009 p24), certainly helped in the survival of the infant *CERN Courier*. It must be said, however, that the scheme did not prove easy to manage, leading



The first editor, Roger Anthoine, in May 1986 when he retired from CERN.

to some controversies about what contents could or could not be accepted. Still, the proof of the idea's soundness was in its longevity and that the model was soon borrowed by other organizations.

The format was a major topic that covered several questions such as title, contents and illustration, language, size, paper weight, periodicity and distribution. Considerations on the publication's title led to some hesitation. The name *CERN Reporter* was initially suggested but finally our one-man, self-appointed committee stumbled on *CERN Courier*, a "nom de guerre" that was accepted by the powers that were. It has stuck so far.

Deciding what the contents would include was perhaps the easier part of the production chain to tackle. Indeed, the development phase of CERN, with its two large (for the time) contraptions called accelerators – a 600 MeV synchrocyclotron and the 25 GeV (initially 24.3 GeV at 12 kG) proton synchrotron – was ripe with a myriad of possible stories that were both scientific and mundane. Editorial content that involved policies was routinely submitted to the director-general, ▷

who was always readily available for advising or checking. The approval of “reported” articles was, of course, always obtained from the interviewees themselves. As for illustrations, financial considerations (restricted to between 25% and 30% of the budget) and printing state-of-the-art limited them to black and white.

Another question concerned which language (or languages) to use but the answer was obvious, because English and French were the two official languages of the organization – and still are. Initially, and for many years, two separate editions came out – *Courier CERN* and *CERN Courier*. A decision by the CERN management in 2005 reduced the French edition of the current *Courier* to an embryo-sized state, thus jeopardizing the interest of a large segment of non-English-speaking staff and workers. Perhaps a bilingual formula could have been chosen to alleviate production costs.

Deciding what format, frequency and circulation should be adopted for the publication proved to be tricky questions, with answers that were, of course, set by costs. However, another factor soon came to light: the time available for editorial production. Indeed, the choice of a monthly versus weekly periodical suddenly became self-evident when, in view of his superior’s untimely death, the budding editor found himself responsible not only for his newborn publication but also for most of CERN’s other public relations involvements such as visits – be they general or by VIPs – and press contacts. The initial print run of 1000 copies allowed for a distribution to staff, who numbered 886 at the end of 1959. However, the interest generated from outside circles – the press, individuals and other organizations and labs – warranted that circulation quickly rose to 2000 copies by March 1960.

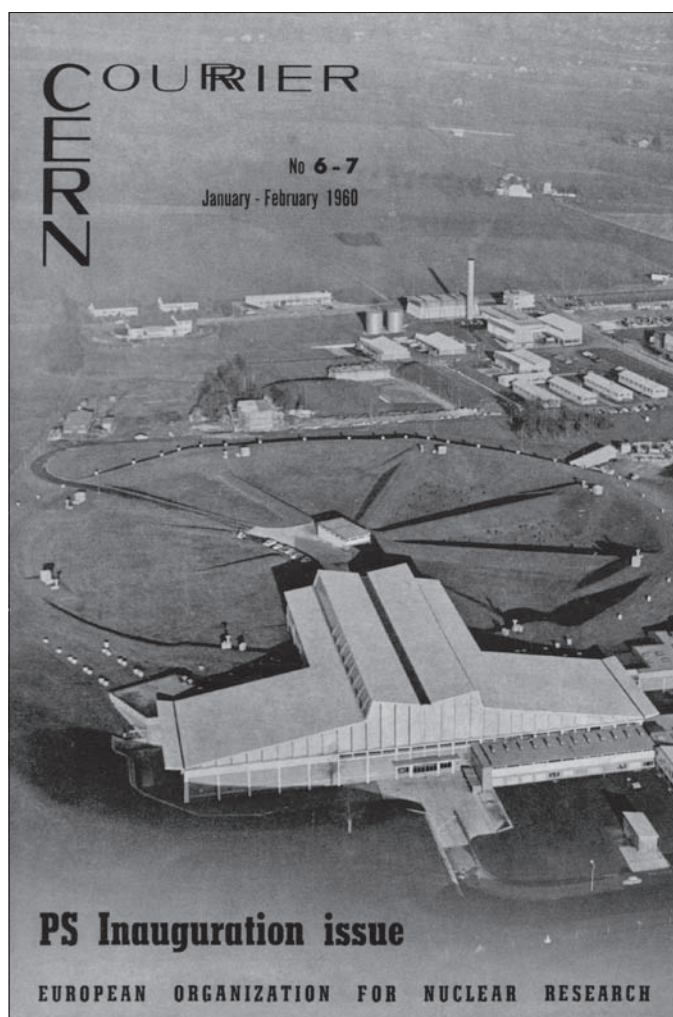
Meanwhile, the choice of a printer had arisen. Who could supply an 8-page, A4-size product printed on machine-finish paper? Three quotes were obtained from local printers and Chérix & Filanosa Cy in Nyon was selected. For distribution it was decided to have the publication sent through external post, primarily to the homes of staff members – with the hope of involving and interesting their respective families, whose influence on staff morale could not be underestimated.

The world premiere

With all of those items mastered, the first issue appeared in mid-August 1959. It was a modest 8-page endeavour but even so it was well received by the “Cernois/Cernites” (yes, we coined the name that early!). Even outsiders responded favourably as witnessed among others by Albert Picot, a Geneva statesman doubling as an inveterate autodidact, and by a British member of CERN Council, H L Verry, who found it “excellent”.

Over the years, the advent of the *Weekly Bulletin* in 1965 allowed the *CERN Courier* to switch from being the house publication to a scientific journal. The *Courier* thus became the ambassador of CERN and particle physics to a large community of knowledgeable specialists and inquisitive people. Indeed, the trend had been set when, soon after its inception, a special issue of the *Courier* was devoted entirely to the PS, coming out in time for the machine’s inauguration on 5 February 1960.

Today, reflecting on the perspective of the *CERN Courier* after 50 years, it is rewarding to see that the once-straightforward attempt at promoting subnuclear research survived the vagaries of time. Personally, the privilege of having worked at CERN half a century ago



The cover of the special issue dedicated to the PS. The January/February issue came out just in time for the inauguration in 1960.

makes one proud to have been associated – albeit in a small way – in the building and strengthening of what was, as the then president of council, François de Rose, said, “the greatest venture in international co-operation ever undertaken in the world of science”.

Résumé

1959 : La naissance de *Courier CERN*.

*Lorsque Roger Anthoine arriva au CERN le 1^{er} mai 1959 il ne se voyait pas entamant une aventure éditoriale et de relations publiques qui allait se perpétuer durant un demi-siècle. Tout cela avait commencé un an auparavant par une annonce publiée en Belgique, indiquant qu’une organisation internationale de recherche basée à Genève comptait se doter d’un périodique d’entreprise. Il s’agissait en fait pour le CERN de démarrer une action de relations avec son personnel consistant à l’informer de ce qui se passait dans ses murs. Dans l’article ci-dessus Roger Anthoine décrit les débuts de *Courier CERN* et se souvient des actions qui aboutirent à la parution du premier numéro en août 1959.*

Roger Anthoine.