

# POSTAL NEWS

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## 1. Labour MPs revolt over post offices

By Jean Eaglesham, Chief Political Correspondent

Published: March 20 2008 02:00 | Last updated: March 20 2008 02:00

A rebellion by Labour MPs against contentious plans to shrink the post office network saw the government's majority reduced from 67 to 20 last night, in a vote on a Conservative attempt to impose a freeze on closures.

About 20 Labour backbenchers defied the government whip to support the Tory motion calling for a halt to plans to close 2,500 post office branches. The scale of the revolt underlined the political sensitivities of the issue.

Labour ministers and MPs were again accused by the Tories yesterday of hypocrisy for campaigning against closures in their constituencies, while supporting the government policy of a "managed reduction" in the size of the network.

The government insisted that the closures were vital to try to stabilise the network, which is losing about £ 3.5m a week, despite an annual £ 150m state subsidy.

Ministers yesterday gave the go-ahead for local authorities to rescue loss-making post offices.

John Hutton, the business secretary, wrote to the state-owned company saying that the government "encouraged" it to "engage with local authorities" that wanted to take over services from branches threatened with closure.

The Post Office should agree such deals only where the council agreed to cover all of its costs under a "commitment for several years", Mr Hutton said.

About 50 local authorities are likely to try to step in to prevent closures, according to the Local Government Association.

It forecast that hundreds of branches could be saved, provided the Post Office changed its "stonewalling" attitude towards such deals.

The network flatly rejected any suggestion it was being obstructive, insisting it was "very interested in any viable propositions".

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## **2. Portugese Postal Workers To Fight CTT**

19 March 2008 by Steve Lawson - © Hellmail.co.uk

5 postal unions, representing more than 75% of the CTT Portugal Post's are opposing Company proposals to change the CTT Collective Agreement.

Workers say the changes are unacceptable, which include the introduction of varying working hours, a move to relocate workers up to 30 km from their normal workplace and the ending of automatic wage rises.

The biggest complaint by the unions is the proposal by CTT to modify contracts that they say would end collective bargaining in two years and transfer workers rights to General Law instead. Workers say they would be losing everything the unions have negotiated into the collective during the last 34 years.

Uni Global, which represents the views of many trade unions in Europe, is calling on support for a petition against the abolition of a collective agreement in Portugal.

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## **3. Gordon Brown tramples on postal votes**

By Andrew Gimson

Last Updated: 2:54am GMT 20/03/2008

Sketch

John Hutton sounded more indignant at being accused of writing four lines of doggerel than closing 2,500 post offices.

Alan Duncan, for the Tories, quoted the following ditty, composed by an anonymous Cabinet minister:

At Downing Street upon the stair

I met a man who wasn't Blair.

He wasn't Blair again today.

Oh how I wish he'd go away.

Mr Hutton, a Blairite minister of such ability that he has survived into the Brown era, bridled at the suggestion that he could be the author of these lines: "I would write better poetry than that."

We have not read any poems by Mr Hutton, so cannot judge how good his defence is.

But the tone of injured innocence in which he denied authorship of the verse sounded far more convincing than the detached and ironical tone in which he defended the post office closures.

When it came to post offices, Mr Hutton adopted the manner of a barrister handed a somewhat ridiculous brief, who is professional enough to defend his client but is not going to make a fool of himself by developing any kind of emotional attachment to the cause.

The name of the client happens to be Gordon Brown, who had appeared shortly before at Prime Minister's Questions, where he made a rather embarrassing impression.

For when David Cameron, for the Tories, congratulated Mr Brown on making "the right decision" to meet the Dalai Lama, the Prime Minister replied in a crude tone: "We make the right decisions at all times."

How Mr Brown laughed at what evidently struck him as a witty retort.

Even dictators like to have their little jokes, and there was an authentically Stalinist quality in Mr Brown's riposte: a totalitarian parade of infallibility, with tanks on hand to crush anyone who stands in his way.

The post office closure programme appears to be proceeding in rather the same spirit.

Though set in motion before he became Prime Minister, one can well imagine that as chancellor of the exchequer he decided this mass cull was the only way forward.

And the manner of the closures is thoroughly totalitarian, with the pretence of consultation doing nothing to hide the brutal determination to get rid of 2,500 branches.

This emerged clearly during Mr Duncan's opening speech for the Tories, in which he observed that "a game of pass the parcel" is in progress, with MPs discovering that when they manage to keep one post office open, "another one is going to be closed".

Testimony flooded in about the bogusness of the consultation process, and continued to flood in once Mr Hutton was on his feet.

So many members interrupted him with tales of woe from their localities that Mr Hutton could make almost no progress with his prepared remarks: "I've been speaking for 20 minutes and, as I said, I'm still on page one."

Mr Hutton quite enjoyed remaining calm in the face of this onslaught.

He showed that he could take it, and allowed MPs to make protests which can be reported in their local newspapers, and at the end of the process he had not budged one inch.

This is how our elective dictatorship works: apparatchiks like Mr Hutton go through the motions of free debate, after which the will of the elective dictator prevails.

Not that Mr Brown was elected to the post of Prime Minister. He reached No10 by evicting the elected incumbent, and has funk'd holding an election of his own.

But we would not dream of questioning Mr Brown's judgment, for as he himself says, he makes the right decisions at all times.

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**4. Greek Postal Savings Bank selects SunGard's BancWare for reporting**  
Wednesday, March 19, 2008; Posted: 12:11 PM

Mar 19, 2008 (Datamonitor via COMTEX) -- PSVGF | news | PowerRating | PR Charts -- SunGard, a financial solutions provider, has announced that the Greek Postal Savings Bank has chosen SunGard's BancWare solution for capital management and Basel II compliance.

The bank will be using BancWare to help generate capital calculations across its network of over 130 branches throughout Greece. The bank will also use BancWare for data management and Basel II reporting.

SunGard's BancWare Capital Manager will be used to help the bank standardize its approach to Basel II compliance, the first step in a strategic, group-wide initiative to put a complete risk infrastructure in place to cover market, interest rate and operational risk. BancWare Data Integration will also be used to extract, cleanse and sort data from the bank's core banking system, which will then be fed into BancWare Capital Manager. The calculations will be run using models, which can be customized

according to changing requirements. The results will then be reported in an auditable format that adheres to regulatory requirements and allows transparency.

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Wednesday March 19, 2008

### **5. Postal Service to remove stamp machines across the country**

by Jake Stump

Daily Mail Capitol Reporter

If you're wondering what happened to those vending machines that spit out postage stamps at the post office, they've been returned to sender.

The U.S. Postal Service has permanently removed the machines from post offices all across the country, including those in the Charleston area.

Customers wanting to avoid standing in line for stamps at the counter could simply feed coins or dollar bills into a machine to buy postage.

Despite their convenience, the postal service did away with them for several reasons, said David Walton, a spokesman for the West Virginia district.

"The machines are obsolete," Walton said. "They don't make parts for them anymore, so when they break down, it's difficult to repair them."

The stamp machines, which first appeared in the 1970s, broke down quite often, he said.

They also accepted only cash and coins, a problem for many folks who prefer using a debit or credit card for transactions.

Walton said it wouldn't have been economically feasible to upgrade the machines to allow card use.

Vending machine stamp sales have also declined in recent years, as customers tend to purchase their stamps by other means, Walton added.

Some machines throughout the country averaged only two or three customers a month, he said.

"Overall, they were not generating much business," Walton said. "There are so many other ways to buy stamps today, and more people are now paying their bills online, using e-mail, phone and fax."

Stamps are still widely available at some ATM machines, retail stores and online at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). Customers can even have their postal carriers drop off stamps at their doors.

In the Appalachian District, which includes West Virginia and half of Virginia, 204 stamp machines will be removed.

Most of them will be gone by the end of March, Walton said.

A notice alerting customers of the discontinuation was posted on each machine 30 days prior to its removal.

Walton noted that customers will still have the convenience of dodging checkout counter lines by visiting the post offices' Automated Postal Centers to mail packages. Those take debit and credit cards, and they also sell stamps by the book.

"Believe it or not, there hasn't been much of a backlash," Walton said. "People have found other ways to get stamps."

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