

# POSTAL NEWS

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## **1. Britain: Postal unions push through attack on pensions**

By Keith Lee

1 April 2008

UK postal workers are currently voting on pension reforms demanded by Royal Mail. Both the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Unite, which represents postal managers, are balloting their members following the end of the company's consultation period.

Royal Mail's demands amount to legalised robbery. It wants to close the current final salary pension scheme with defined benefits from April 1 and transfer existing and new staff to a scheme linked to "career average" earnings without defined benefits, subject to the vagaries of the stock market. The basic retirement age will be raised from 60 to 65 from 2010. The attack on pensions by Royal Mail is being mirrored in virtually every industrialised country.

The CWU has called on postal workers to vote no to the proposals, but the ballot is purely "consultative" and makes no call for strike action. It will be used to put pressure on the company to make cosmetic changes that can be sold by the union to its membership. CWU Deputy General Secretary Dave Ward has made clear that the union leaders will give Royal Mail what it wants, saying that the CWU "understand and support the need for pension reform...no change on pensions is an option that will cripple the company financially."

Royal Mail operates one of the biggest pension schemes in the country, with more than 450,000 retired and working members. The scheme has operated for many years with a huge deficit and now stands at £5.6 billion—making the company technically insolvent. This is because successive governments, like many private companies, took a "pensions holiday" when the pension fund was in surplus for 12 years from 1988.

The value of the fund then slumped, following the collapse in stock markets. This fact only came to light because international accounting rules required companies to publish additional information.

In 1999, the Labour government announced its intention to liberalise postal services as required by European Union legislation and passed the Postal Services Act 2000. It appointed Allan Leighton as chairman and Adam Crozier as chief executive to carry out a “radical transformation” of Royal Mail, involving a programme of restructuring and cost-cutting and “reform” of the pension scheme.

In 2006, following an announcement that UK postal services had been “fully liberalised,” then-Trade and Industry Secretary Alistair Darling outlined a “Financing Agreement” releasing £850 million in profits held in a reserve fund to prevent the pension fund from collapsing. In addition, he made available a £900 million loan for modernisation of the business and agreed to a “phantom” share scheme involving “partnership units” that could give staff up to £5,300 each by 2012 provided draconian “transformation” targets are met.

Royal Mail continues to insist the pension scheme must be “reformed” because costs have gone up by £193 million a year to £722 million, threatening its ability to compete with its national and international rivals. Profits had fallen by a third to £223 million at the end of last year.

A spokesman for Royal Mail said the company was surprised at the unions’ call for a ballot, declaring, “We already have signed written agreements over pension changes, so we expect the unions to honour them.” He added that the changes “are in line with those agreed with the CWU last autumn, and are necessary if we are to achieve the best possible pension plan that the company can afford.”

Last autumn, postal workers were involved in a bitter dispute over pay and conditions that escalated into a series of wildcat strikes threatening to get out of the bureaucracy’s control. The CWU leadership, under General Secretary Billy Hayes, stepped in and abruptly ended the strike without consulting the membership. For days, no one knew why the strike had been ended or what had been agreed with the company.

Eventually, Hayes claimed the union had secured an increase in wages amounting to 6.9 percent over 18 months and that it had “decoupled” the issue of pension rights from the proposed deal. In the event, the true pay figure was just 5.4 percent over two years, with an additional 1.5 percent increase conditional on implementation of “total flexibility” in the workplace. Since then, Royal Mail continues to insist that the agreement included “the union’s support for the company’s overall proposed pension reform,” whilst the unions say that it has been “misrepresented.”

The CWU leadership has become deeply discredited over its support for privatisation over the last decade and especially for the decision last autumn to end the industrial action. In the last few months, it has become clear that Royal Mail managers have used the meagre pay rise to divide postal workers and force them to sign local flexibility agreements. In some offices, postal workers are being told to work four 10-hour shifts or cover for absences without overtime before they receive the 1.5 percent.

The Early Shift Allowance has also been replaced with a Mixed Shift Allowance, which means a loss of £10 a week for a postal worker.

One postal worker from Stockton on Tees, writing in the [royalmailchat.co.uk](http://royalmailchat.co.uk) blog, describes how the local union rep recently went to sign such an agreement, which had been subject to weeks of discussion, and so release the pay rise. The worker explained how the deal “involved 6am starts, 30 minutes flexible time (hour and a half either side of 6am). When the rep went in to sign it up she was told that we would have to start at 6.30 am. This was not agreeable and the goalposts had been moved again. She was told we would not get anything unless it was signed.”

The CWU bureaucracy is facing growing calls for strike action over pensions but it is anxious to prevent a political struggle developing against the Labour government.

Once again, the Socialist Workers Party—Britain’s largest left-radical group—is providing a left cover. Hayes, who has been a regular speaker on SWP platforms including the party’s annual “Marxism” conference, has been invited back to this year’s conference as though last year’s dispute had not happened.

In a recent Socialist Worker article, “Let’s fight the pensions pickpockets,” Gareth Eales, deputy branch secretary of the CWU Northamptonshire Amal branch, explained, “We all want harmony after last year’s dispute. But if we have to lock horns with the employer again, we must all answer the call. I never thought I’d wish for this, but we need to get Royal Mail managers on board in this fight too—after all it’s their pension scheme too. Although expecting some of those snakes to have a backbone is somewhat wishful thinking. It is vital that we bring the Royal Mail managers’ CMA union into this fight, and utilise the apparent fruitful relationship between our general secretary, Billy Hayes, and the joint general secretaries of the Unite union of which the CMA is part. The government is Royal Mail’s sole shareholder and it must be forced to intervene on this issue.”

Eales adds, “Given the position the government took during last year’s strike; let’s not expect too many favours. However, there are still some good Labour MPs who provide support for the CWU. A solid political campaign is required with Billy Hayes leading from the front.”

Eales’s call for a campaign led by Hayes and a handful of Labour MPs is supported by CWU national president and SWP member Jane Loftus, who also calls for the government to intervene to “sort out” the question of pensions funding. Last autumn, Loftus voted against the pay and modernisation deal, but remained silent for months after as the dispute dragged on. Despite her privileged access to the machinations of the union tops, Loftus did nothing to alert postal workers to the sell-out that was being prepared and, despite voting down the deal, made no call on postal workers to do the same. To date, the SWP has made no accounting of Loftus’s silence.

The SWP’s call for Labour to intervene is particularly ominous since it was the government that initiated the reforms and has made abundantly clear its determination to push on with them.

On March 13, Downing Street replied to an e-petition promoted by the SWP, which called on Prime Minister Gordon Brown to dismiss Leighton and Crozier. The reply said the government “fully supports the Board of Royal Mail as it takes forward its plans to modernise the company so that it can compete in a fully liberalised market” and repeated its intention to press ahead with a new review of the postal sector, citing increased competition from e-mails and text messaging and the full liberalisation of the European postal market by 2010.

On the day the review was first announced, December 17, 2007, Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform John Hutton expressed his full support for Leighton and reappointed him as chairman, saying he “will help provide the continuity needed for Royal Mail to make progress on its modernisation plans and to contribute to the review of developments in the postal services market announced today, and I am grateful to him for agreeing to extend his term of appointment.”

If postal workers are to defend the pension scheme and advance their struggle against the ongoing privatisation of the post office and job losses, it is necessary to carry out a political rebellion against the CWU leadership and its left apologists such as the SWP. Postal workers must recognise that they are involved in a direct political struggle against the Labour government, for which trade union action alone is not enough.

The degeneration of the old workers’ organisations is the product of their nationalist and reformist programme and organisation. When production was predominantly organised within national borders, it was possible to extract concessions from the employers through strikes and protests, without challenging the essential framework of the profit system. Today, the union bureaucracy has abandoned such a struggle in direct response to the ability of the major corporations to organise globally and accepts their assertions that attacks on jobs, working conditions and pensions are necessary in order to beat international competition.

The right to a decent standard of living in retirement requires the development of a political movement of the international working class aimed at abolishing the capitalist system and reorganising society based on human need, not private profit.

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## **2. Pointandship Software, Inc. Adds U.S. Postal Service Option to Its Shipping Expense Management Software (SEMS)**

WALNUT CREEK, Calif., March 31 /PRNewswire/ -- Pointandship Software, Inc. (Point&Ship) today released the new version of its Shipping Expense Management Software(TM) (SEMS(TM)) with the addition of U.S. Postal Service mailing options. The upgrade now allows clients the ability to select Priority Mail, Global Mail & First Class Mail via the SEMS(TM) platform as shipping & mailing options.

"The addition of USPS products to our software will let our clients realize even greater success with controlling their corporate small parcel shipping & mailing," said Ted C. Mesa, founder, President & CEO of Point&Ship.

The web-based SEMS(TM) is the only enterprise-wide, on-demand, multi-carrier shipping management solution that streamlines corporate shipping processes, standardizes procedures & realized cost savings. The proprietary software provides oversight on express, ground, freight & courier services through all major carriers, unifying client shipping needs into a single, web-based interface. With external billing & reporting tools, clients have an additional level of control to ensure their charges are accurate & appropriate.

"The upgrade to our software will now let clients accurately allocate postage costs to their appropriate departments. Never before has the finance department within any corporation had the ability to simply drive out postage costs from their SG&A expense categories," added Mesa. "Bringing the USPS to our platform gives clients complete visibility into their entire small parcel shipping & mail spend without the need to install cumbersome business rules, or change shipping policies."

Founded in 1994 by Mesa, Point&Ship has annual billings in excess of \$75 million & a client list that includes Fortune 100, 500 and Global 2000 companies including banking & financial institutions, tech companies, retail as well as leading universities around the United States.

For more information, please visit Point&Ship's website at [www.pointandship.com](http://www.pointandship.com) .

About Point&Ship Software, Inc.

Pointandship Software, Inc., founded in 1994 & based in Walnut Creek, CA, is a privately-held, Minority Owned Corporation with over \$75 million in annual billings. Shipping Expense Management Software & SEMS are trademarks of Pointandship Software, Inc. For more information, visit [www.pointandship.com](http://www.pointandship.com) .

SOURCE Pointandship Software, Inc.

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### **3. AIS Media Announces New Itelemal® Microchip that Tracks and Reports Postal Mail Delivery**

IT, New Media & Software

Press release from: Strategic Vision, LLC

PR Agency: Strategic Vision

(openPR) - Atlanta, GA/April 1, 2008 – AIS Media ([aismedia.com](http://aismedia.com)), an Interactive marketing and web services company, announced today it has filed for patent rights to its new prototype Itelemal® Microchip that reports real-time statistics of delivery, open and response rates of U.S. Postal Mail.

Working at the AIS Media Technology Research & Innovation Center, a team of company engineers recorded the breakthrough on Monday, March 17th 2008 at 8:45 AM when they confirmed receipt of a transmission from an Itelemal® Chip enclosed

in a First Class envelope and mailed five days earlier from Atlanta, Georgia U.S.A. to an undisclosed address in Whales, U.K. The “delta01-01” transmission confirmed that the envelope was delivered, opened and that the recipient interacted with the contents.

The Itelemal® Chip works by transmitting signals via a Q1 low level frequency over WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access) to a secure server at one of AIS Media’s Atlanta data center. The degree of accuracy using the Itelemal® Microchip has been scientifically deduced at 97% accurate.

“This is a landmark moment and an incredible advancement in technology for direct mail marketers world- wide,” said Thomas Harpointner, CEO of AIS Media. “Direct mail marketers have been tormented by postal mail’s inability to report whether or not their marketing pieces were opened or tossed into the trash. The rise of email marketing systems, such as Excerpto® Mail ([www.ExcerptoMail.com](http://www.ExcerptoMail.com)), which provides detailed delivery, open rate and response statistics (all at about a penny per email sent), has put direct mail at a major disadvantage. Our new Itelemal® chip will help level the playing field between email and postal mail in terms of reporting capabilities”, said Harpointner.

With another increase in U.S. postal rates scheduled this May, the development of the Itelemal® Chip is very timely, providing direct mail marketers the vital data they need to significantly improve the results of their direct mail campaigns. With this new technology, marketers will not only know with pinpoint accuracy if their direct mail piece has reached its destination, but also if the contents were viewed.

AIS Media admits that the technology is at an early stage and that there are still challenges that need to be solved, especially when mail is delivered to remote areas or foreign countries where WiMAX technology does not exist. The Itelemal® Chip’s current cost about \$1,700 each, may also be cost-prohibitive for some marketers. AIS Media hopes to significantly reduce the cost of the Itelemal® Chip as it expects to begin mass production by May/June 2008, pending receipt of a really big Series A funding round.

Harpointner will be giving a live demonstration of the technology for the press at 9:00 A.M., Monday, April 20, 2008 at the AIS Media Technology Research & Innovation Center located at the intersection of Harris & Baker Street, NW, Atlanta GA 30303. A second demonstration, which will be given to the general public, at 1:00 P.M. AIS Media is seeking businesses that are interested in participating in a free 60 day trial of Itelemal® powered direct mail marketing.

Parties interested in attending the event should R.S.V.P at: [info@itelemal.net](mailto:info@itelemal.net). For more exciting information about the Itelemal® Chip, or to participate in a free 60-day trial, please visit: [www.itelemal.net](http://www.itelemal.net)

Founded in 1997, AIS Media is an award-winning Interactive Marketing and Web Service Company and the developer of the Excerpto® Mail and Excerpto® Storefront email marketing and e-commerce applications, respectively. AIS Media’s comprehensive suite of professional Internet services includes professional web site development, search engine optimization, credit card processing, and Internet

consulting. AIS Media's solutions are available directly and through its global network of certified partners. For more information, visit: [www.aismedia.com](http://www.aismedia.com).

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#### **4. eBay Canada Releases Trading Activity Data by Postal Code**

By Ina Steiner

AuctionBytes.com

March 31, 2008

Belle River, ON; Sooke, BC, and Kemptville, ON were named "tops in trading" by eBay Canada. For the first time, eBay Canada ranked Canadian online trading activity for an entire year, and smaller communities counted big. On a provincial level, the top three provinces of eBay activity in order were Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec.

Belle River, Ontario (N0R 1A0) was number one in terms of eBay trading, with a total of 1,294 individual buyers and active sellers (people who completed a transaction during 2007). The top-buying category for Belle River was identified as "car and truck parts," and "NHL hockey cards" was the community's top-selling category.

eBay Canada has released data as part of its eBay Canada's Community Counts initiative, designed to help understand online buying and selling behavior among Canadians. Information for the top 5,000 Canadian postal codes and other statistics can be found online.

<http://www.ebaycommunitycounts.ca>

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Collected by Chairul Anwar, Bandung, Indonesia.

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