

POSTAL NEWS

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OCTOBER 13, 2009, 8:26 A.M. ET

1. U.K. Postal Workers Set Strike Date

Dow Jones Newswires

LONDON -- U.K. postal workers will likely strike from Oct. 22, but the Communications Workers Union that represents the workers said Tuesday it has offered Royal Mail a deal to avoid a protest.

In a letter written to Royal Mail managing director Mark Higson, the CWU called for the organization to reveal its business plan and address "outstanding problems of job security, work levels, bullying and reward." The CWU said on its Web site this is "a genuine alternative to reach a lasting agreement."

Last week, the union said 76% of postal workers it had balloted were in favor of nationwide industrial action to protest against what they said was management's lack of consultation over a modernization drive.

Royal Mail said the CWU is reneging on an agreement, forged during the last national postal strike in 2007, to modernize the firm in the face of declining postal volumes, increased competition and a crippling multibillion-dollar pension deficit.

The CWU said Tuesday that dates for a strike will be announced Thursday. Under U.K. legislation, seven days' notice is required for a strike action.

Write to Dow Jones Newswires editors at asknewswires@dowjones.com

2. Warning of £34m cost of postal strike to economy

Tuesday, 13 October 2009

A seven-day national postal strike could lose the Northern Ireland economy £34m, experts have warned.

According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) one week of strike action by 120,000 workers could particularly hit retailers across the province by an estimated £6.2m.

The figures were revealed as Royal Mail bosses and union officials were locked in crunch talks regarding possible strike action. No decisions were reached last night.

However the Federation of Small Businesses in Northern Ireland has warned a national strike could be “catastrophic” for already struggling firms.

The report said that nationally the UK would lose £1.5bn.

High street retailing, magazines and professional services will also be badly hit, while delays in receiving cheques could prove “fatal” to some firms, the report warned.

“Smaller businesses are likely to bear the brunt of these costs since 98% of small business post is through the Royal Mail, while only 70% of larger businesses use the Royal Mail and most of them use alternative mail sources,” said the report.

The postal executive of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) met to discuss when to call out their members following a huge vote in favour of industrial action.

CWU members are angry about the Royal Mail's handling of its modernisation programme.

Further talks are due to be held later this week but there is little sign of a breakthrough.

The officials discussed a number of options, including a nationwide walkout by all postal workers, or a rolling programme of action involving different groups of workers such as delivery and sorting office staff taking action on different days.

The union has to give Royal Mail seven days' notice of any walkout, so the earliest strike date would be around October 19. Others could be staged in the build-up to Christmas.

Wilfred Mitchell, FSB policy chairman for Northern Ireland, said a national strike could be “catastrophic” for already struggling firms.

“The loss and damage of post can have a devastating impact on small firms which, in the worst case, loses trade and clients because cheques and invoices don't arrive on time – sometimes up to three weeks late,” he said.

"At a time when small businesses are cutting costs and doing all they can to keep afloat during the recession, the postal strikes can have a disastrous impact on their cash flow.

"After a tough year and with Christmas fast approaching, this is a key time for small firms to ensure they are getting invoices and cheques paid on time, and products and services to their customers to ensure they can start 2010 in the strongest position possible so they can help stimulate the economy."

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3. BCC: Inflation figures allow additional stimulus in the next few months

Tuesday, 13, Oct 2009 12:00

Commenting on the inflation figures for September, published today by the ONS, David Kern, Chief Economist at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"CPI annual inflation fell further below the Bank of England's 2% target, and the RPI measure remains deep in negative territory. Given the threats facing the economy, this allows the MPC to provide additional stimulus without fear of a short-term upsurge in inflation.

"Although the stock market is buoyant and the housing market is improving, the tentative signs of UK recovery remain very fragile. Bank lending is still too weak, and this poses very serious problems for small firms. The recent disappointing figures for manufacturing highlight the serious risks facing the economy.

"Against this background, it is important for the Bank of England to increase the quantitative easing programme to £200bn, and to consider special measures to stimulate lending"

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4. BCC: Strikes risk irrevocable damage to Royal Mail's reputation

Thursday, 08, Oct 2009 12:00

Commenting on the Communications Workers' Union's (CWU) decision to widen postal strikes, and on-going disruption to mail services, Dr Adam Marshall, Director of Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"This strike announcement defies logic at a time when businesses and government are working hard to move the UK economy back to growth. Postal delays are already hurting small businesses and major companies across the country.

"At a time when businesses are taking drastic measures to keep as many people in employment as possible, the CWU's call for strike action in the run-up to the busy Christmas period is akin to a death-wish."

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5. BCC: Postal strikes will harm recovery unless all sides show some leadership

Tuesday, 13, Oct 2009 12:00

Commenting on the Communications Workers' Union's (CWU) decision to widen postal strikes, and on-going disruption to mail services, David Frost, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"The announcement today will be a serious knock to business confidence. The run up to Christmas is a vital trading period for firms and if this strike goes ahead orders will be lost and the fragile recovery will be undermined.

"It is about time those involved in the industry showed some much needed leadership and brought an end to this disruption."

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