

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Washington-area postal districts earn first-class ratings

May 10, 2008 - 6:24pm

WASHINGTON (AP) - Two postal districts in the Washington region have earned high marks for their service.

In a recent survey by the Gallup Organization, the U.S. Postal Service's Northern Virginia District and the Capital District received five-star customer service ratings.

The Northern Virginia postal district is one of only four nationwide to earn the distinction for 10 consecutive quarters.

The survey asked customers to rate the Postal Service in areas such as helpfulness and efficiency of its clerks, as well as the reliability and accuracy of its home delivery service.

The Northern Virginia District extends as far west as Shenandoah County and as far south as Madison County.

The Capital District includes Montgomery County, Prince George's County and parts of southern Maryland.

Information from: The Washington Post, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

2. Papering Over The Cracks In Postal Liberalisation

10 May 2008 by Mark White - © Hellmail.co.uk

A rapid downturn in profits on letters at Royal Mail, already putting pressure on the 'one-price deliver anywhere' universal service, is prompting rumours in terms of possible solutions.

One idea making the rounds is the abolition of Saturday deliveries although Royal Mail is vehemently against such a proposal and it would impact on other postal providers feeding into Royal Mail's network. It seems an unlikely scenario and would mark a real step backwards for postal services, particularly since Sunday collections have already gone.

Cash from government might be possible and in the longer term, unless Postcomm do a u-turn and ask all postal operators to contribute to the cost of the universal service, the government will probably have to pay towards the USO (universal service obligation) any way. Funding of the USO is an issue for all European countries but with the UK already up to it's waist in postal liberalisation whilst most of Europe slowly catches up, the USO is already top of the agenda. However with most countries under pressure due to the credit crisis and UK borrowing likely to soar even more over the next couple of years, the government is far more likely suggest rapid deregulation in the hope that a relaxing of the rules will ease pressure on the USO.

Increasing stamp prices is another option, although it would be the most unpopular and probably be underlining a failure of deregulation. Stamp prices have already risen this year after an increase in April.

For the government, already battered by rejection in the local elections, finding something positive to say to the electorate will be it's number one priority at the moment. Post office closure announcements were even halted during the election so as not to 'taint' decisions on who people should vote for - not that it made a great deal of difference. Further degradation of the postal network, even if these days, we use it less for general correspondence, would just make things tougher still for Prime Minister Gordon Brown. To date, the weight of liberalisation has been put on Royal Mail, partly to break it's monopoly by brute force, and partly to obviate any responsibility on government, evident during last years postal dispute.

Simply asking Royal Mail to slash costs further still will do nothing to restore Royal Mail's poor reputation. It is still unclear how much the switch to part-time staff (now company policy) or hiring agency staff, has impacted on levels of theft at Royal Mail. Confidence in Royal Mail's ability to get things right is not great.

This week I have again contacted Royal Mail after they delivered post to me for the fifth time, destined for an entirely different street. I have already gone through customer services three times, received a letter from them to assure me it has been dealt with, only for the problem to resume again. If I am confident of anything, it is the notion that they

will never resolve it, and I am not alone in sensing that cost-cutting is already leaving it's mark.

The latest revelation that Postcomm are suggesting that quality of service targets could be reduced to make life easier for Royal Mail, is the last straw. If Postcomm can bring them down at will to solve problems, or to justify chipping away at Royal Mail's ability to provide a service, they might just as well not bother having targets in the first place. In fact, don't bother coming in - just stay in bed. That, coupled with the absorption of Postwatch into a larger consumer body this year, which many say heralds a dumbing-down of consumer representation, it is fairly clear that domestic post will continue to head ever downwards, year on year. As is so often the case on policy, when a plan starts to fall apart, the plan is rephrased to suit the result rather than actually dealing with the problem. This could well be one of those.

With the word 'failure' erased from the dictionary, those charged with the job of papering over cracks are at least gainfully employed - there might even be scope for overtime.

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3. Endpaper: Proust and a postal order

Last Updated: 12:01am BST 10/05/2008

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Coming soon to your local library, says Alex Clark: the police and a post office

[More Endpaper](#)

The post office, as you come to realise in your search for somewhere to send a package by special delivery within five miles of home, is one of the more beleaguered institutions of modern times. So, too, is the municipal library.

Both find it hard to turn a profit; both find themselves subjected to seemingly ceaseless demands to prove that they are moving with the times and remaining "relevant" to contemporary life.

And yet they are different: one is noisy, the other is quiet; one is somewhere you hope to enter and exit in the minimum possible time, the other promises long afternoons of peaceful contemplation; and one is where you cash in your child benefit, while the other is where you go to find a copy of Proust.

It's hard to see how they might, as it were, do each other a favour. But adversity often makes for strange bedfellows, as a recent report in *The Bookseller* revealed.

The news is that the Royal Mail, in the process of shutting down 2,500 branches, has approached a number of local authorities with the unlikely idea of relocating some of them inside libraries.
advertisement

Reaction from the librarians on the ground is yet to be widely canvassed, but initial response is not quite as sceptical as one might expect, with some high-ups tending to the opinion that a PO counter popping up in the middle of the Hornblowers wouldn't be the end of the world.

It's hard to see quite how the punters of either service would react, though. I count myself a reasonably even-tempered person, but if there's one guaranteed trigger to bad language it's the tortuous attempt to tax my car once a year (yes: I know you can do it online, but actually, if you were born in the year of the monkey or there's an "r" in the month, it's harder than it looks).

I can't imagine that the person gently dozing in the corner over a history of naval warfare wants to be disturbed by the howl of outrage from someone who's forgotten to bring their MOT certificate again.

And this certainly isn't the time to distract library staff from the serious tasks facing them. A more disquieting report highlights the possibility that police will require librarians to provide them with information about the literary and online habits of those who have come under police surveillance, with the rider that such requests are thought likely to proceed largely from areas with a concentrated Muslim population.

The police position is that, once someone has attracted their attention, the librarian is merely one in a whole series of people who will be required to help them with their enquiries. Naturally, this development is fraught with all sorts of ethical problems, most obviously the tension between intellectual freedom and the privacy of the individual, and the maintenance of security.

The days of the library as a haven in which people can pursue the most esoteric enthusiasms without anyone turning a hair might be nearing their end, a prospect far more unsettling than the sudden appearance of those mind-boggling pension-day queues.

The metropolis's (uncertain) gain is literature's loss: it's unlikely that Boris Johnson, the newly elected Mayor of London, will have time to add to his canon, at least for the foreseeable future. But those looking for a steer into what he has in store for the capital could do worse than to mug up on his back catalogue.

Aptly enough, Johnson's work seems to have displayed an abiding interest in the problems of parking, an issue he might well find himself fed up to the back teeth with after a few weeks in charge of a city in which the search for a space is only marginally easier than the search for a functioning post office.

An ambulance guilty of a traffic infringement provided a plot turn in his novel *Seventy-Two Virgins*; while his delighted schoolboy look at the world of high-performance cars, *Life in the Fast Lane*, provides evidence of a somewhat cavalier approach to carbon emissions and congestion charging.

That's before we've even got on to Johnson's humorous cautionary tale, *The Perils of the Pushy Parents*, which will surely fill London's education authorities with something close to horror.

Meanwhile, however, what takers for a revitalised life of letters for the losing candidate, Ken Livingstone, one of whose long-ago forays into print was the snappily titled *If Voting Changed Anything They'd Abolish It* ?

Hard to see booksellers going for the new thriller from Ken in the way they hoovered up *The Dream of Rome* - in which Johnson favourably compared the Roman empire to the European Union - but, as the election demonstrated, the strangest things come to pass.

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4. Postal union's stand against Israel undemocratic, wrong

Susan Martinuk, For The Calgary Herald

Published: Friday, May 09, 2008

Oh no. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has labelled Israel an "apartheid state" and has therefore passed a resolution to support a boycott, divestment and sanctions against it.

The Internet and private couriers seem well on their way to making our inefficient "snail mail" system obsolete and Canada's rural post offices (and therefore jobs) are fast disappearing. But CUPW doesn't have time to deal with such menial issues. Instead, it used its annual convention in April to take on the real issue of concern to Canadian postal workers -- resolving the millennia-long dispute between Arabs and Jews.

Jimmy Carter couldn't do it. Bill Clinton couldn't do it and neither could George Bush or the United Nations. But the union bosses at Canada Post are going to bring about peace in the Mideast?

Not exactly a reasonable goal. No wonder modern-day unions are labelled irrelevant and Canadians (outside of the union's last stronghold, the public sector) no longer take them seriously.

Yet CUPW has resolved that it will call on Israel "to immediately withdraw" from occupied territories and "abide by UN Resolution 242." It will take this stand until Israel "recognizes the Palestinian people's

inalienable right to self-determination . . . (and) Palestinian refugees return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194."

While muddling about in foreign affairs, CUPW also called on the Canadian government to "immediately withdraw troops from the war in Afghanistan and provide genuine humanitarian aid to the people." Apparently protecting citizens from the brutal Taliban, getting them working again, building roads and schools, and ensuring that girls have access to education instead of rape and executions at soccer stadiums simply aren't "humanitarian" enough for the union.

Perhaps union leaders would like to personally go there and carry out these activities without the protection of soldiers. I'm not even a union member, but I'd gladly pay dues to make that happen.

CUPW isn't the only union with grand delusions. Two years ago, the Ontario division of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), passed a similar resolution. In a demonstration of true union solidarity and inclusivity, there was no prior warning that such a resolution would be presented and it was voted on at a Saturday meeting when Jewish union members would likely be at home celebrating the Sabbath.

As it was then, the current anti-Israel resolution has been widely pilloried in the media and CUPW president Denis Lemelin has been busy attempting to clarify CUPW's position. In an April 30 letter to the National Post, Lemelin stated that the union had no plans to disrupt mail service to and from Israel "as of yet."

That's not exactly reassuring. In fact, the words essentially suggest that such a proposal is under active consideration. So he clarified his clarification in a May 2 letter to the Post, saying "as of yet" simply means "never say never."

Will CUPW's position on Israel lead to postal workers withholding or censoring mail delivery? "Never say never."

Postal workers have reacted quite strongly to their new anti-Israel position.

A CUPW member wrote on a National Post blog, "I do not want anything to do with this boycott or anything outside labour relations with my union. Unions are to represent their members, not engage in activities that . . . have totally nothing to do with causes like this." Others stated: "I am thoroughly disgusted . . . that tens of thousands of our union dues were spent on delegate wages and administrative costs to discuss this issue" and,

"We are terribly disgusted and embarrassed by the actions of those who take our union dues."

Union members are obviously quick to associate (and condemn) the use of their dues to support radical union policies that have absolutely no connection to work-related issues under a collective agreement. On the other hand, CUPW leaders also seem quick to connect dues and policy issues -- it interrupted its foreign policy meetings to pass a resolution to raise union dues by 3.4 per cent.

It's insult on top of insult to unionized Canadians, who are among the last employees in the developed world to be forced to join a union and to hand over union dues that are subsequently used for political purposes that they don't support.

Workers in Australia, New Zealand and the 47 nations in the Council of Europe cannot be required to pay dues to support the union's political (and other) purposes that are not related to the workplace.

It's considered a violation of their human rights, and it's now the law.

In fact, in 2007, Sweden was found in violation of human rights because of the mere suspicion that a union was using the dues of unionized employees (who were not union members) for political activities.

In the case of CUPW, there is absolutely no doubt that it is using forced dues for political purposes that many of its members don't support.

CUPW leaders who are so keen to have Israel uphold UN policies and human rights might want to take a minute to think about this: their days of using forced dues for to support the radical political agenda of union leaders may be running out as Canadian workers look at the basic human rights that are now afforded union members in most other countries.

Susan Martinuk's column appears every Friday

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5. Postal Service Reports Second Quarter Loss; Economic Slowdown Cited

WEBWIRE – Friday, May 09, 2008

National On-Time Performance Continues at Record Levels

WASHINGTON, DC—Despite cost-cutting measures, the U.S. Postal Service ended the second quarter with a net loss of \$707 million, driven by a continued decline in mail volume resulting from the current national economic climate. Meanwhile, the on-time delivery of First-Class Mail continued at record levels in the second quarter.

The second quarter results were presented during today's meeting of the Postal Service Board of Governors. For the first six months of the fiscal year, the Postal Service has essentially broken even, reporting a net loss of \$35 million on revenue of \$39.3 billion.

Mail volume for the quarter ending March 31 totaled 51.3 billion pieces, a 3.3 percent drop from the previous second quarter. First-Class Mail volume decreased by 3.1 percent and Standard Mail volume was down 3 percent.

Year-to-date total mail volume is down by 3.1 percent compared to the same period last year. If the trend continues, this will be only the seventh year total mail volume has decreased in the last 50 years and could be the largest decline since 2002.

Revenue was \$18.9 billion in the second quarter, an increase of \$584 million, or 3.2 percent, over the same period last year reflecting last year's price adjustments, but well below expectations. Expenses in the second quarter totaled \$19.6 billion, an increase of \$52 million, or 0.3 percent, from the previous year. The slight increase was driven by an increase in transportation expenses, particularly fuel costs.

"Weakness in the housing and credit markets, both of which are heavy users of mail, are leading the declines in mail volume," Postmaster General John Potter told the Board. "While mail volume may rebound with the economy, it is clear we need to accelerate our efforts to seek new structural and process changes to remain economically viable and to further improve customer service."

One such change, made possible by the Postal Act of 2006, gives the Postal Service new pricing flexibility to better serve its customers. "Next week, for the first time ever, we'll begin offering price incentives for Express Mail and Priority Mail, enabling us to better compete for package business," Potter said.

The Postal Service also continues to focus on reducing costs and increasing efficiency. For example, workhours have been reduced by more than 18 million in the first two quarters of the year compared to similar periods in 2007.

Second Quarter Service Scores

In other action, Postal Service Consumer Advocate Delores Killette told the Board national on-time performance scores for the delivery of First-Class Mail continued at record levels in the second quarter. National overnight service was 96 percent on-time, a record high for four quarters in a row. Two-day service was 94 percent and three-day service was 92 percent on-time. All these scores are the highest ever achieved in quarter two.

First-Class Mail performance is measured independently by IBM Global Business Services. The process measures First-Class Mail from the time it is deposited into a collection box until it is delivered to a home or business.

Other Action:

Also during today's meeting, the Board authorized funding to construct a 715,743 square-foot processing and distribution center on a previously acquired site in Richmond, VA. The Board also voted to have the Postal Service enter into a new ten-year lease for the New York International Service Center/John F. Kennedy Air Mail Center, located on the JFK Airport site.

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