

The Delray Democrat

Trump's Threats Against the Postal Service Are a True Danger to Democracy¹

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Old Ben Franklin was a man of many enterprises, including a publishing business. But he had a competitor, Andrew Bradford, who distributed his upper-crust American Weekly Mercury, while our “Poor Richard” Franklin put out the plebian Pennsylvania Gazette.

What to do? Good ole’ political back-scratching. Franklin curried favor with Andrew Hamilton, the speaker of the Assembly, and won himself the government printing contract. With more horse trading, Hamilton helped Franklin win the plum job of clerk of the Assembly which, Franklin said, “secured to me the business of printing the votes, laws, paper money . . . that, on the whole, were very profitable.” Indeed.

But Bradford had the advantage of being Philadelphia’s postmaster, and, as any good politician would, he used his position to prevent Franklin from sending his Gazette through the mail. So, Franklin also did what any good politician would and bribed the postal carriers.

When some discrepancies were found in Bradford’s bookkeeping, and he failed to pay the debt, Franklin became postmaster and said, “nyah, nyah” (or something like that) and forced Bradford out of business. It’s a wonder the backstabbers didn’t freeze in the Philadelphia winter with so many holes in the backs of their coats.

It all sounds quaint now, but the story should be a cautionary tale about the danger of private control—or dictatorial control—of something so fundamental to democracy as a postal service. He who controls distribution wins. Trump has threatened to cripple mail-in balloting by withholding funds to the USPS or taking the service private. Bidding the USPS out to private contractors would be a disaster. We’ve seen the tragic results of the privatization of Homeland Security’s detention centers.

The USPS predicts the corona virus will reduce mail revenue by more than 50% this year. When the economy shut down, the postal service asked for a bail-out, but Trump and Treasury Secretary Stephen Mnuchin decided to exclude the Postal Service from the \$2.3 trillion stimulus package. Instead they blackmailed the Service, offering a mere \$10 billion loan—and only if delivery rates are increased and labor costs reduced. Those reductions and layoffs will affect the 28.6 percent of black USPS employees; the black community is already hurt by working no-isolation service jobs and by the disproportionate number of Covid-19 infections.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, July 2020, p. 3.

Commentators have noted that the USPS is the only institution that can reach every household in America. And the current Postmaster General has promised to deliver even those mail-in ballots that lack proper postage. Our postal service is an integral part of our democracy. The danger of Trump's attempt to clamp down the distribution hose is self-evident.