

An editorial on the US mail

In the last four weeks, we have received more complaints from customers who haven't received their packages than in all of 2019. 35 people, all in the United States, to whom we shipped packages within 48 hours of receiving their orders, were still waiting for books that should have arrived weeks before. Some were angry: gifts for special occasions didn't make it to be given, books for classes didn't show up on time, and valuable first editions were seemingly in limbo, with no updates available from USPS. Several demanded refunds. Others said they may never do business with us again, after such shoddy treatment.

And not only has the service been slower, it's also been erratic. Packages listed as "delivered" when we entered the tracking information, were never delivered, or were delivered a few days later, causing much consternation. We had always assumed the postal status "delivered" was sufficient proof. Nope.

We blame the President and his enablers and appointees. Trump has always had it out for Bezos and Amazon, envious of Bezos's wealth and standing, and annoyed at Bezos's ownership of the Washington Post. Although it's well established that Amazon makes the USPS money by using its services, Trump has said that the postal system *loses* money by giving bulk deals to Amazon, and has stated he wants to see rates for sending packages quadrupled. That would put a mail order business like mine out of business.

Already, rates for non-domestic shipments have indeed quadrupled over the last ten years. It is harder and harder to sell books outside the US for us and anyone else in our business. This isn't Trump's fault: the postal system is indeed a money loser, and it also carries a huge pension fund and liability: \$120 billion dollars. At some point, the government will have to reasonably address that problem instead of pushing the debt forward to be dealt with by the next generation.

But to address it in the middle of a pandemic and on the cusp of a national election that promises to overburden the postal system? Trump and his ethically challenged buddy Louis De Joy are not only hurting Common Crow Books, but all mail order businesses.

They are actively suppressing the vote and “kneecapping” as Obama put it, the USPS, right at the time everyone needs to feel more confident that at least this Federally mandated system can function competently. They are not only trying to disenfranchise people of color, poor people, union employees, workers, folks with rural addresses, and anyone in a blue state, they are also hurting their own supporters by choking off their incomes, their Social Security, their medications and their access, all in the middle of a pandemic.

When Eugene Silvain, head of the Comédie-Française, was old and sickly and nearing the end of his life, he decided to stay in Paris in the early fall, while his wife, Louise, and their two children went to the south of France where they had a vacation home. Silvain was lonely in Paris and wrote to Louise every day. A few days later, she would receive his letter and write him back. There was lots to share: a statue of Silvain was being unveiled in Paris, and Louise and he had a wide circle of friends in Paris and in the Var, where she was, so there were lots of gossip, plus rehashing luncheons, dinners and theatrical events.

Can you imagine how upset Louise and Eugene would be if some of their letters took weeks to arrive?

Well then imagine how goddam irate I’ll be if I send in my ballot and it doesn’t get counted. I’ll be so goddam irate that my customers’ irritation when they don’t receive a book won’t hold a candle to mine. I will be irate for them and for myself and for all of you.

Angrily,

Emily Hetzel

