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The Hurricane and the Postal Service The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BC Editorial Board

I have lived through several hurricanes and major storms. When you do not know whether your roof will hold together or whether you will get flooded out (and our basement was flooded in the 2011 hurricane), the anxiety is indescribable. Thus, when the government warns people to stay inside and off the streets, if you are in touch with reality, you take that seriously.

So, it was with great surprise that in the middle of Hurricane Sandy that I saw a postal van. Yes, the US Postal Service, despite the federal government being closed on Monday, was somehow operating. The mail was delivered to us. Airline flights were being cancelled; subways had ceased operations; buses were not moving...and we still got our mail!

I had two immediate thoughts on seeing the postal van. The first was to applaud the courage of postal workers. I actually think about this regularly. They are really not joking when they talk about 'neither rain, nor sleet...' will stop them. Here you had a letter carrier driving in the middle of a hurricane to make sure that we received our mail. Damn!

The second thought was quite different: what will happen if the postal service is dismantled and privatized? Let's be clear that the agenda of the Republicans and of some Democrats is the privatization of the postal service. When we keep under-funding the postal service and making service cuts, it eventually creates a level of despair and frustration that will push the public to embrace privatization. This approach is called *economic strangulation*. This economic strangulation

is what we have been witnessing, and not just recently. Cutting the hours of post offices, cutting employees, and reducing other services do not build popular confidence.

And so I stood, watching the postal van, wondering what would happen if the postal service were privatized. Would a private contractor really care about delivering the mail under harsh conditions? Could we count on workers going beyond the call of duty? That is the real issue in privatization. It is not just that privatized facilities--of any sort--seek to reduce certain costs by cutting the wages and benefits of workers. No, it is more than that. Privatization changes the relationship of the workforce to the job that must be done, i.e., it changes their relationship to the public. The owners of these privatizing companies are not particularly interested in serving the public. They are interesting in making a profit. Their slogan would not be anything approaching "Neither rain, nor sleet..." will stop postal delivery. It will be more something like "As long as I can make an extra buck delivering the mail it will be coming at you."

So, if you have been sitting on the sidelines while the future of the postal service has been discussed, think again, and just ask yourself if you care whether or not you receive the mail that the Constitution promises.

In watching the postal van drive off, I hoped that this would not be the last time I would see such dedication displayed.

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