

BELLY OF THE BEAST

ONE MAN'S DREAM, ANOTHER'S NIGHTMARE

by Frank N. Wilner

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Recently retired Postmaster General Marvin Runyon is a twenty-first century visionary. Too bad that following an immensely productive private-sector career Runyon chose in 1992 to devote six years of his creative artistry to the second and sole-surviving evil empire—the federal government.

This innovator who installed the Ford company's first assembly-line robot has been leveraging our tax dollars to erect a backdoor assault on the fourth amendment so effective that before most of us retire there will be no way to keep big brother out of our homes.

"I see the U.S. Postal Service continuing to be the one hand of government that touches every American, everywhere in this land, every day," Runyon told a fawning National Press Club audience on the eve of his May retirement.

Good grief, he has transformed 750,000 polyester-suited postal employees into little Octoberists that note which households receive Victoria's Secret catalogues and which families have white supremacist, black panther, and antiabortion pen pals.

Already the Postal Service gathers and sells what *Time* calls "the most complete demographic data on consumer tastes and interests." All the data was harvested from what we insert into and receive from the U.S. mail.

By 2020, predicted Runyon, the Postal Service will be "on the desktop" of every American working at home. "We will have total and instant control over all the 267 billion pieces of mail. We will be linked electronically with

virtually every postal administration on earth. I am talking about a virtual global enterprise," he said, "transparent to the customer."

Runyon's vision is for every family to "look forward each day to that reassuring touch of government." More horrifying is Runyon's assertion that "if any of this sounds far-fetched, let me point out that there is not a thing I have mentioned that is not already under way now."

For his outburst, Runyon received a lengthy ovation from the Washington press corps, which expressed not a whimper of anxiety over so emboldened an assault on individual liberty.

Runyon also has been undertaking an aggression on economic liberty. But one capitalist not cowering is United Parcel Service CEO Jim Kelly. No potted palm when it comes to questioning authority, Kelly fulminates that the government-protected monopoly on first-class mail is used to cross-subsidize sales of express mail and international package delivery in competition with UPS and FedEx.

"The Postal Service is thumbing its nose at the free enterprise system by systematically attacking and undermining its private-sector competitors through unfair government-granted advantages," asserts Kelly. "The Postal Service is an anticompetitive, antifree-enterprise government bureaucracy that wouldn't last one day in the free and open market of real competition."

Them's fightin' words, but consider the evidence. Begin with parking tickets. UPS and FedEx cough up millions of dollars to

pay them, but the Postal Service is immune. Furthermore, the Postal Service avoids income, property, and vehicle taxes as well as 18.4 cents per gallon in federal gasoline taxes and vehicle license fees.

In Japan, where UPS and FedEx wait up to twenty-four hours for packages to clear customs, the Postal Service's State Department cronies helped it muscle virtually immediate clearance.

Kelly says also that the Postal Service's private-sector competitive Global Package Link charges a heavily subsidized twenty-six dollars to ship a ten pound package from San Francisco to London—less than the charge to mail that same package from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore.

Perhaps that is because the Postal Service can not manipulate private-sector international rates. But appended to the Postal Service's statutory domestic monopoly is a requirement that UPS, FedEx, and other private-sector competitors charge twice the amount set by the Postal Service for its second-day domestic air service. Such abuse of market forces would land anyone but the Postal Service in the goal for price fixing.

Enter Rep. John McHugh, Rep-N.Y., who has crafted the Postal Reform Act, which would eliminate the artificial floor on private-sector express rates and require the Postal Service to cover all its costs on all services where it doesn't hold a monopoly. H.R. 22, however, is dying of neglect. Congress seems more interested in highway spending bills, aid to Bosnia, and harassing tobacco companies than protecting liberty.