

# New US Postal Rates Undermine Small Publications

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The US Constitution's First Amendment guarantees the right of free expression including a press free to do it in. Jefferson, Madison and Congress wanted information easily and cheaply disseminated to the public and structured a comprehensive postal system designed to do it reaching into cities and villages alike including in new developing parts of the country in the West. The mass media of that time consisted largely of pamphlets like those Tom Paine wrote and colonial era newspapers beginning with the first ever published called the Boston News-Letter debuting in April, 1704 and later Ben Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette first published in 1728 that gained the largest circulation of that time and was considered the best newspaper in the colonies.

Later ones survived and flourished because Congress wanted them to. It chose to underwrite their proliferation by not taxing them and through a system of low affordable postal rates and free exchange of newspapers among themselves. Congress then gave all newspapers equal privilege to encourage their growth and help prevent government from manipulating news and public opinion the way it's done now through the dominant media in all forms.

In his 2004 book, *The Creation of the Media*, Princeton sociologist Paul Starr explained how politics in early America assured the nation's postal system would make it possible for the press to grow and thrive. He wrote: "In the 18th century, the idea was that the press could be people's guardian. (It) could help check abuses of power." Unanticipated at the time was how media would develop becoming so concentrated and dominant it would end up "pos(ing) new problems for democracy." It's even worse when the media decides it's in its own interest to partner with government instead of being its watchdog.

Such is the state of things today, and it's led to first time ever changes in postal policy directly subverting USPS' own 215 year history. That's according to the urgent message just sent his Free Press supporters (including this writer) by the organization's founder, author, media critic, activist, and noted professor of media studies at the University of Illinois' main campus in Champaign-Urbana Robert McChesney.

He noted how rarely he sends out messages to "everyone in (his) address book (but did it this time on a matter he finds) "of staggering importance and urgency (because) There is a major crisis in our media taking place right now; it's getting almost no attention and unless we act very soon the consequences for our society could well be disastrous. And it will only take place because it is being done without any public awareness or participation (going against) the very foundations of freedom of the press (in all) American history."

McChesney goes on saying (unless stopped) the US postal system is implementing "a radical

reformulation of its rates for magazines” to place a much larger cost burden on smaller periodicals than on the largest ones standing to benefit from the policy change. Up to now, postal policy “converted the (First Amendment’s) Free Press clause....from an abstract principle into a living breathing reality for Americans,” and it’s been that way “throughout our history.”

All that’s about to be scrapped with new rates scheduled to take effect July 15 under which small publications will pay postal rates as much as 20% higher than the largest ones in a willful plan to undermine them, weaken media competition further, and as McChesney explains: “make it almost impossible to launch a new magazine (or other publication) unless it is spawned by a huge conglomerate” wanting to get huger. This new postal policy, crafted “in the dark of night,” will adversely affect every small political journal in the nation including those providing the only print source of real news, information and analysis of vital world and national issues many readers rely on but may lose.

That’s the whole idea with the nominally independent US Postal Service (USPS) in bed with big media to stack the deck in its favor and in the process subvert the sacred First Amendment moving flank speed toward the dustbin of US history unless derailed. That’s no small statement with this policy less than 90 days from taking effect along with the still unresolved battle in Congress over Net Neutrality allowing readers access to this article they may not have if telecom and cable giants gain control of the internet so it’s no longer free and open.

McChesney notes the new postal rates “were developed with no public involvement or congressional oversight (in a scheme) drafted by (media giant) Time Warner, the largest magazine publisher in the nation.” McChesney believes responsible postal bureaucrats failed to consider how adverse their action is to a free and open press. This writer has darker thoughts, however, believing it’s another example of dirty political machinations with corporate America telling government and bureaucrats to jump and their responding how high.

McChesney continues saying how hard it is to exaggerate the “corruption and sleaziness of this” whole business with a big media lawyer he quotes admitting: “It takes a publishing company several hundred thousand dollars to even participate in these rate cases. Some large corporations spend millions to influence these rates.”

He continues saying the “genius of the postal rate structure over the past 215 years was that it did not favor a particular viewpoint (and) it simply made it easier for smaller magazines to be launched and to survive.” It’s a democracy issue, it affects all small and mid-sized ones, on the left and right, in all fields or subjects like “politics, music, sports or gardening.”

The whole dirty business went on with so little publicity with only big media involved, it’s only come to light a few weeks ago, and it’s now late in the game to try stopping it. But that’s just what must be done and here’s how:

Go to [www.stoppostalratehikes.com](http://www.stoppostalratehikes.com). Sign the letter to the Postal Board protesting the new rate system and “demanding a congressional hearing” with no radical changes until one is gotten.

Help spread the word on this to friends and family and get them to act as well – NOW.

Important: THE DEADLINE FOR COMMENTS IS MONDAY, APRIL 23. Action is needed promptly.

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