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NITRATE PROPAGANDA, 12-16 John Street, New York

Rural Parcel Post Service.

The Record-Herald publishes an article which gives the best account of the present status, and the need, of a parcels post that we have seen:

It is the ambition of Postmaster General Cortelyou and Assistant Postmaster General DeGraw, who has immediate jurisdiction over the subject, to extend the usefulness of the rural delivery mail service as far as possible and to make each carrier serve the convenience and comfort of the people on his route to the very last degree. How this may be accomplished is now the subject of inquiry and reflection. The postmaster general and his subordinates in charge of the service have been holding frequent consultations for several months. Various plans have been proposed and some of them have been recommended to congress. Chairman Overstreet of the house committee on postoffices is taking a deep interest in the subject. There are, of course, differences of opinion, but all are agreed that the rural delivery carrier may be made more useful than he is and that the people living in rural districts may get a great deal more for the \$20,000,000 that is being spent for their benefit than they are realizing at present.

The proposition receiving the greatest amount of attention at present relates to the delivery of merchandise; to assisting the farming population to purchase supplies and have them delivered at their doorsteps. The government delivers information and intelligence, but not merchandise in any quantity, as the tax, which amounts to 16 cents per pound in postage, is prohibitive. It is very much larger than is charged for the same service in the European countries.

Originally rural delivery carriers were allowed to carry passengers, baggage, parcels, etc., in their conveyances, and to do shopping for the farmers' families along their routes. It was a great accommodation to the people. A farmer's wife could send to town any day for a spool of thread or a pound of coffee or sugar, or his daughter could persuade the carrier to buy her a box of confectionary or a piece of ribbon. It was not compulsory on the part of the carrier, and he was allowed to charge fees for his services so that his own compensation was increased while the public convenience was promoted. About every day almost every carrier in the country was intrusted with some errand. They used to do shopping, send telegrams and take subscriptions for the newspapers; but, two years ago, a paragraph was inserted in the appropriation bill for 1904 prohibiting all this.

The explanation was that the carriers were delayed and demoralized in the performance of their duties, and

that this private express business was a temptation for them to make money for themselves and discriminate in favor of certain citizens and neglect others. Jealous and spiteful merchants who were not patronized complained to members of congress, and they made trouble about it and frequently filed charges, so that the department was very much annoyed. In order to satisfy these grumblers the entire 30,000 carriers were put under the ban.

At present carriers are allowed to handle merchandise that is not mailable—that is, they can get a prescription filled at a drug store to oblige any farmer on their route because the law forbids the sending of liquids through the mail, but they cannot buy a sheet of paper or a spool of thread or a yard of cotton cloth now, because those are mailable. This, of course, is just and right, although it looks a little inconsistent, and it would be a great gratification to more than 13,000,000 people if the carriers were authorized to do errands. At the same time if the government could collect a low rate of postage upon the purchases of the carriers or upon packages of merchandise ordered otherwise, it would undoubtedly produce a very large revenue.

This is done in Europe everywhere. For example, Germany has a system of delivering parcels through the mails within a distance of forty-six miles at the following rates:

	Cents
Five pounds and under.....	3
Between five and ten pounds.....	6
Between ten and twenty pounds....	12
Between twenty and thirty pounds..	18
Between thirty and forty pounds....	24
Between forty and sixty pounds....	40
Between sixty and 100 pounds.....	60

Similar rates are charged for similar service in other parts of Europe. In Switzerland and Belgium the rates are nearly one-half those of Germany.

We have a similar arrangement with several foreign nations under the regulations of the International Postal union and today a groceryman or a general storekeeper in any village in the United States can send a package of merchandise, excepting explosives and liquids, to Calcutta or Zanzibar or Ladysmith, South Africa, or Potosi, Bolivia, for less than one-half the postage he would be required to pay if he sent the same thing to a farmer living two miles from his store.

This seems incredible and absurd, but it is nevertheless true. When I was returning from a trip around the world two years ago, I wrapped up all the guide books and other books that had accumulated during the journey and mailed them to my address in Washington from Hong Kong, because if I had kept them until I reached San

Francisco, I would have been compelled to pay double the amount of postage. From Hong Kong I was allowed to send eleven pounds in a package; from San Francisco or any other part of the United States I could not have sent more than four pounds.

We have parcels post treaties with nearly all of the European countries, but we have no such arrangement between the states, and, although we can send packages weighing not more than four pounds as fourth-class matter, we are compelled to pay a very much higher rate of postage than on foreign mail.

When congress prohibited rural delivery carriers from doing errands for their patrons it provided no substitute, although the postmaster general urged it as necessary. He called attention to the fact that the telephone service, which now reaches almost every farmer in the country, had created a demand for a parcels post service, in connection with the rural delivery, for carrying packages of dry goods, groceries, drugs, tobacco, stationary, books and other articles from the stores in town to farmers in the country, and he recommended the passage of an act authorizing packages of merchandise weighing not more than five pounds to be sent through the mails at the rate of 3 cents a pound. A bill for that purpose was introduced by Mr. Ellis, of Missouri.

The farmers, of course, are very strongly in favor of it. The local merchants throughout the country, however, are opposed to it for fear that their customers will send to the mail order houses of the large cities for their supplies.

The postoffice officials are in favor of the proposition, not because they believe it will serve a great public convenience, but also because they are convinced that the postage collected on merchandise will go far to meet the annual deficit of \$14,000,000 in the postoffice accounts. Postmaster General Cortelyou, who has given the subject very careful study, believes that the deficit will certainly be largely reduced if rural carriers are allowed to carry parcels at a low rate of postage, whether a general system of parcels post is adopted or not.

The average revenue received by the government from the rural free delivery carriers is 41 cents a day. The average cost per carrier of maintaining the service is \$2.00 per day. The average amount of mail handled is twenty pounds per carrier per day and the bulk is less than one bushel per day. The service would cost no more if the weight of the mail were two hundred pounds or five hundred pounds. The average carrier could easily handle that amount in an ordi-

nary vehicle, while the receipts of the government would be increased several hundred per cent., and the convenience of the patrons of the service would be served much better than they are today, if he were allowed to do so.

Mr. De Graw, the fourth assistant postmaster general, has a scheme which he thinks will serve all reasonable demands from the patrons of the service, secure a large increase in the revenue, and at the same time meet the objections that have been offered local merchants on rural delivery routes. Mr. De Graw says:

"While the establishment of rural mail delivery telephone service by private interests, there has grown up a demand by the patrons of the rural service for the delivery of small packages of merchandise, such as food-stuffs, tobacco, dry goods, drugs, etc., on orders to the local merchants by telephone or otherwise. The value of these packages of merchandise is usually small, and the present rate of postage of one cent per ounce is practically prohibitive. The patron or merchant cannot afford to pay 16 cents for the delivery of a pound of tobacco or coffee or similar articles, but if a special rate were established on such matter from the distributing office, it would be a great convenience to the department.

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