

The postal service

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Published: 2024-12-18

Dear friends,

In an almost bourgeois fugue state today I felt rising rage at the para-privatisation of the postal service in this country. Yeah, oddly specific trigger for today's writing, ey. This, in particular, after being scorned dozens of times for deliveries by "express post" that almost feel like spite come 3-4 business days later than their estimate with an accompanying gaslighting green sign saying "Updated". Ugh. Okay, but let's think about the motivations of the company behind all this, because as we know, Australia Post is technically a government body, but with absolutely none of the benefits of nationalisation –just like almost all our other services which have been sold to the lowest bidder to extract maximum profit for shareholders and screw consumers everywhere.

Australia Post operates, fairly uniquely, as a corporate entity. However, unlike privatised utilities, such as water and electricity, which are run for a profit subject to "government regulators" (a genius invention that allows the government to take credit for any semblance of good work done by corpo operators, while ensuring that billionaires accumulate more skimmed wealth back from consumers forced into monopoly "markets"), it remains a corporate entity of the government. The government is the only shareholder. So the profits extracted by the postal service flow to highly paid leadership and government pockets, with no reciprocal investment from government back into the postal service. Simply put, the postal service in this country is a business owned by and beholden to the government, who wants it run like a business. The worst of both worlds. Anyway, enough whinging, let's analyse it.

The corporatisation of public entities in Australia, which, obviously, is exemplified by Australia Post, represents another form of twisted neoliberal transformation –one that maintains a facade of "public ownership" while implementing private sector logic and extractive practices. This hybrid model, where government enterprises are restructured to operate as corporations while remaining *technically* state-owned, serves as a transitional phase in the broader project of privatisation. The transformation of Australia Post from a public service focused on universal mail delivery to a "government business enterprise" obsessed with profit metrics and market share epitomises this process. Under this model, essential public services are forced to operate according to market principles, leading to branch closures in "unprofitable" (read: poorer) areas, workforce casualisation, and the prioritisation of (late) parcel delivery (where competition enables price gouging) over basic mail services. This corporatisation sees the gradual absorption of public institutions into capitalist logic without the political resistance that outright privatisation might generate. Sneaky, and effective.

The Australia Post case is particularly interesting, to me right now as I wait for a package, as it demonstrates how corporatisation functions as a mechanism for transferring wealth from workers and communities to capital while maintaining the illusion of public ownership. CEO salaries skyrocket while front-line postal workers face increasing precarity and intensified exploitation. Regional communities lose services deemed "inefficient" while executive bonuses (remember that watch?) are justified through metrics that privilege profit over public good. The corporate structure enables the worst aspects of private sector management – obsession with metrics, worker surveillance, and continuous cost-cutting –while the government connection provides convenient cover for exploitative practices. Harvey called this process "accumulation by dispossession", operating through institutional transformation rather than outright privatisation, the slow bleeding of public value into private hands

through the imposition of corporate logic on public services.

The broader implications of this corporatisation trend reveal how neoliberal ideology has thoroughly infected Australian governance –as though we didn’t know this already. Even nominally public institutions are now expected to operate as if they were private businesses, with “commercial returns” taking precedence over social benefit (hmm, this feels awfully familiar in the context of universities). This creates a twisted form of exploitation where public assets, built through generations of collective investment and labour, are transformed into extractive enterprises that operate against the interests of the very communities they’re meant to serve. The ALP’s embrace of this model demonstrates their complete capitulation to neoliberal logic –maintaining technical public ownership while gutting the actual public service mission of these institutions. The result is a form of privatisation-by-stealth that could actually be more damaging than outright privatisation, as it corrupts the very notion of public service while providing political cover for continued exploitation.

So, obviously, I decided to have a look at the strategic priorities and KPIs of Australia Post which, naturally, show us how corporatisation transforms public services into engines of capitalist accumulation under the guise of “modernisation” and “efficiency”-literally, using these words. The focus on “winning in eCommerce” and “market leading digital experiences” reveals how thoroughly market logic has colonised what was once a public service mission [1]. From these priorities, Marx might have suggested, we see the subordination of use value (delivering mail to all Australians) to exchange value (maximising *profitable* [i.e., not to consumers, but B2B] parcel delivery services). The language used in their strategic framework –with its emphasis on “customer-centric” decisions rather than public service [2] –shows again how discourses of neoliberal capitalist ideology have thoroughly gripped once public institutions [3].

While the government “transparency portal” hosts the reports, the name must be ironic because, the absence of genuine public service metrics from their Enterprise Scorecard and the complete inaccessibility of internal success metrics show an opaque postal corporation, not a public good. From what we can see, there are KPIs focused entirely on commercial performance and market competition –a framework that would be indistinguishable from any private logistics company. With reports obscene executive compensation packages (again, luxury watches, anyone?), including multi-million dollar payouts even during periods of loss, reveal how corporatisation enables private sector wealth extraction while maintaining the facade of public ownership.

The Post26 Strategy [4], with its technocratic emphasis on “digital transformation” and “customer experience”, serves as ideological cover for the continued dismantling of *universal* service obligations. As mentioned, when they discuss “reimagining the Post Office network”, what they really mean is closing “unprofitable” branches in working class and regional communities while investing in premium services for wealthy urban areas. This strategic direction demonstrates passive revolution, toward neoliberalism, the gradual transformation of public institutions through the implementation of market logic and corporate governance structures. The result is a publicly-owned institution that actively works against public interests while generating private profits through executive compensation and contractor arrangements –precisely the outcome intended by neoliberal restructuring. And I, for one, find that incredibly sad.

The subterfuge of “almost privatisation” here is sick, particularly after decades of privatisation in the country. Under successive Labor and Liberal governments, Australia has witnessed the systematic dismantling of public services through privatisation: the continued expansion of capital into previously uncommodified spheres of social life. From telecommunications (Telstra) to energy infrastructure to healthcare, this transformation represents both a transfer of ownership and a fundamental shift in how these essential services are conceptualised –from public goods to sources of private profit extraction. Could it get any more

gross? Yeah. The privatisation playbook follows a familiar pattern: first, public services are deliberately underfunded and undermined, creating artificial crises that justify private sector intervention. Then, public assets built through generations of collective labour are sold off at bargain prices to private interests. This process has been particularly aggressive in Australia, where neoliberal ideology's grip on *both* major parties has resulted in bipartisan support for privatisation despite clear evidence of negative outcomes for workers and service users.

The ideological justification for this "privatisation", in all its forms, relies on manufactured consent, the carefully cultivated belief that private sector "efficiency" naturally leads to better services and lower costs. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yet this mythology serves to mask the fundamental contradiction at the heart of privatised essential services, and the Australian public falls for it every single time. The incompatibility between the profit motive and the social necessity of these services is rendered invisible. When basic human needs like healthcare, energy, and transportation are subjected to market logic, the result is inevitably the prioritisation of shareholder returns over public good. The ALP's role in this process is, as always, insidious using its historical connection to the labour movement to provide progressive cover for fundamentally regressive policies that transfer wealth and power from workers to capital. But let's not get started on the Labor party right now.

The deliberate degradation of public services in Australia shows progressive neoliberalism (borrowing from Fraser), the coupling of regressive economic policies with a superficial veneer of social progress. This deterioration has hit marginalised communities with particular force, creating *compounded exploitation* at the intersections of class, race, disability and gender. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, for instance, face both the withdrawal of culturally appropriate services and the imposition of privatised alternatives that fail to meet community needs. The disabled community confronts an NDIS increasingly shaped by market logic rather than care requirements. These kinds of targeted impact reveals how the degradation of public services functions as a mechanism for reinforcing existing social hierarchies while creating new forms of dispossession. And damn its pernicious.

However, within this bleak landscape of corporatisation and privatisation, spaces for resistance and transformation continue to emerge. Honestly, all the time, opportunities for resistance and assertion of new ways of working abound. The contradictions that make Australia Post's "hybrid" model so exploitative also create opportunities for worker and community organising. When postal workers face intensified exploitation, when communities lose vital services, when the gap between executive compensation and front-line working conditions becomes too grotesque to ignore, the potential for collective action grows. The union movement, despite decades of neoliberal attacks, retains significant strength in the postal sector -and the public's growing frustration (okay, maybe just "my growing frustration") with deteriorating services creates natural allies for workers' struggles.

More broadly, the failure of privatisation and corporatisation to deliver on their promises of "efficiency" and "improved services" has created cracks in the neoliberal consensus. So much so that their CEOs are being exterminated. Each time an "express" parcel arrives days late (lol, sorry I can't help but whinge), each time a rural community loses its post office, each time workers face intensified surveillance and exploitation, the mythology of market superiority becomes harder to maintain. These contradictions provide openings for advancing alternative visions. Ones that reconnect public services with their original mission of serving human needs rather than generating profit. The future of truly public services depends on our ability to imagine and fight for alternatives to both outright privatisation and the cynical half-measure of corporatisation.

In solidarity,

Aidan

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1. https://auspost.com.au/content/dam/auspost_corp/media/documents/statement-of-corporate-intent-2023-24-to-2026-27.pdf
 2. https://auspost.com.au/content/dam/auspost_corp/media/documents/2023-australia-post-annual-report.pdf
 3. <https://www.transparency.gov.au/publications/communications-and-the-arts/australian-postal-corporation/australian-postal-corporation-annual-report-2023-24/overview/our-strategic-priorities>
 4. <https://stest.npe.ourpost.com.au/about-us/our-business-and-purpose/post26-strategy> I mean, really, for how long can a company lean on “COVID impacts” as an excuse for poor domestic shipping strategies?