

Franklin Ford Collection

edited by
Dominique Trudel &
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FRANKLIN FORD COLLECTION

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Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News

FRANKLIN FORD

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GENERAL NEWS OFFICE

FRANKLIN FORD, Director

280 Broadway, NEW YORK

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN New York has reached the stage where its further progress requires the erection on scientific lines of a main centre for the local News System, and to meet this need the General News Office has been established. Its first business is the responsible or scientific organization of New York's municipal news. The telephone and rapid transit have given instant access to all the facts, and so have made possible the absolute registration and co-ordination of municipal affairs. As Government is the organization of intelligence, municipal progress in New York is directly dependent on the action in hand. The political question of the hour is presented. The General News Office is a public institution under the principle of Contract.

THE GENERAL NEWS OFFICE WILL CO-OPERATE WITH THE CENTRES OF THE MUNICIPAL SYSTEM

All the facts in any particular case will always control the action. The whole evolution of the city Government has been toward the regis-

tration and delivery of the facts for the guidance of both officials and the public. This publicity development from within the municipal system has culminated in the present Department of Finance, which is the city's general accounting centre. It has the power to compel the recording of all transactions. The function of the Finance Department is to report the entire range and character of the city business, but its accounting cannot come full circle without a general news centre which will make intelligent demands on the Comptroller's office, and which will be to the local news system as a whole what the Finance Department is to the municipal system. A reciprocal working relation with the Department of Finance is implied, the foundations therefor having been laid in a prolonged study of the Department and its place in the municipality. A like relation will obtain with all departments of the city Government, each of which is a bureau of municipal information on its own account.

ROUNDING OUT THE CITY GOVERNMENT

A scientific news centre, or news clearing house, is needed to complete the organic form of the city Government. Until there is one centre which can be held responsible for the possession of knowledge concerning all phases of city business, and its prompt delivery, the government of the municipality is not organized in any adequate sense. Within the municipal system, a general accounting centre is at last provided in the Department of Finance, but this is not enough, as the whole field of knowledge, both local and general, has to be laid hold of and made to contribute to the city's needs. The General News Office will bring the municipal facts of Chicago, London, and Berlin side by side with those of New York. At the same time it will make the facts of New York's government accessible to the world, and thus supply the growing demand for authentic news in this field.

THE TRUE IDEA OF MUNICIPAL REFORM

The governing principle of the General News Office reveals the true idea of municipal reform. Reform in city government must follow the lines of systematic accounting and scientific publicity. The Department of Finance will provide the former and the General News Office will supply the latter. The only thing to be relied upon is the continuity of science, and its infinite organization in space and time. The rise of the professional accountant, who stands for the scientific interest, is an important factor in the advance. Without his full functioning, municipal information cannot be organized. Unbiased inquiry is the only possible non-partisanship.

THE NEWS MOVEMENT PRIMARY

Under the sway of science the news movement will become the primary influence in municipal affairs. Pages have been written concerning the credit for the downfall of Tweed, while the real interest centred in accounting for his rise. With full responsibility in handling municipal news, such abuses as are typified in the story of Tweed could not come into existence.

PUBLIC REPORTS OF GREAT VALUE

The exhaustive preparation necessary for the founding of the General News Office has resulted in a series of original reports of the greatest value regarding the development of municipal government in New York. These reports show how the advance in conditions is making for better city government, and mark out the way in which all orders of men can co-operate with the natural forces in solving the municipal problem. The full remedy appears at the moment of the greatest complexity and danger, just when electric communication has removed the last hindrance to the organization of intelligence. For the first time, we have in the reports of the General News Office a literature of the municipal question on the basis of fact. These reports possess universal interest for men of affairs and all students of politics. A municipal advance in New York is of world-wide interest.

PROCEDURE WITH REFERENCE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

Reports of the General News Office will tally with the official record. They will further the needs of the Department of Finance and all other city departments. The organization of the Finance Department has been charted, and will be reported in sufficient detail to inform the public concerning its function and working relation with the municipal system. It is important at this juncture that the people be brought to a new and larger recognition of the Comptroller's office. The word organization, as used in the field of Government, now takes on a more definite meaning. It means primarily the collection and co-ordination of the facts, and the perfecting of organs to this end. The conduct of New York's municipal business cannot reach the highest efficiency until its intelligence is systematized and at the command of everybody. Proceeding further, comprehensive reports will be made on the function and administrative methods of all divisions of the city Government. These reports will have direct value for the Mayor, the Comptroller, and other city officers, as well as the business public.

A SURE CHECK ON THE TAXING POWER

Owing to the growth in authority of the Comptroller and the other executive officers, who now constitute the real city legislature in the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, there is need of a new and more effective check on the taxing power. This must be provided through making the local news organization scientific.

A WORKING RELATION WITH EXISTING CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

The General News Office will serve as a clearing house for the numerous societies in New York which are seeking municipal improvement, and its literature of fact is at their service. The usefulness of such societies as have a definite function will be enhanced by the incoming of a main centre, while the fad element will be eliminated through association with the commercial principle.

CITIZENS WILL CONTRIBUTE THEIR FACTS

The General News Office invites all citizens to register the facts in their possession bearing on the city's welfare. With exact methods and a main centre, the town will speedily become self-reporting. A larger community of interest will result from the new methods. By giving the news system unity we make it real, and so are enabled to introduce division of labor on the basis of science. The facts may now be classified and set in relation, each according to its actual value. The central office will do for the whole movement of municipal news what the Ship News Office at the Battery does in its field, and with equal precision. The numerous bureaus of information already existing in New York will be connected together, and the resources of all made available.

THE REGISTRATION OF EXPERT OPINION

The General News Office connects with all centres of expert inquiry in relation to the needs of New York's government. A complete system of registration will be developed. Thus, whenever the public interest requires, the new centre will gather and co-ordinate the facts relating to a given problem in municipal engineering, and will communicate the results to city officials and the daily press. Such class or technical newspapers as have become expert centres in this field will be drawn upon as occasion may prompt. Under modern communication, the movement of intelligence is becoming as organic as the action of the Post Office, which connects with all interests and all individuals.

THE IDEA OF INTEGRITY

The General News Office brings into commerce a new concept—integrity in the handling of news. This far outruns the mere idea of veracity. News becomes a commodity in the full meaning of the word. It is a thing of convenience, and may be dealt in on the basis of responsibility for statements made. A directing and all-pervading principle is let into the news business.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SCIENCE

Using the municipal need of New York city as the first objective, the General News Office proposes the organization of science. The physical science men, especially in England, have been trying for years to devise a plan for “distributing the results of science,” but, working under the endowment system as they do, they have not been able to see that the end must be gained through a commercial advance, by a forward step in the organization of news.

A FAR-REACHING ADVANCE IN GOVERNMENT INSPECTION

The development of a positive or systematic news system will insure universal and trustworthy Government inspection. All this is involved in the scientific idea of news. For the first time in history, the promotion of the general welfare, which is the province of Government, becomes a normal business pursuit. Self-interest is the duct of sympathy. Under the inspection of a responsible and omnipresent news organization, the late “Slocum” horror in the East River¹ would have been impossible; a rotten life preserver would be instantly reported. PUBLICITY IS THE FORCE WHICH CORRECTS AND REGULATES THE ACTION OF THE SOCIAL BODY.

¹ [In June 1904, the *General Slocum* caught fire and sank in the East River, killing more than a thousand people.]

THE FURTHER ORGANIZATION OF DEMOCRACY

The problem of municipal government in New York is the very heart of the democratic question. To systematize New York's municipal reporting, and after it the whole news movement of the metropolis, is to carry forward the organization of democracy. The Science of Politics has been worked out by the General News Office as the basis of this enterprise. Its formulation is in the language of commerce. Its application is parallel with practice, entering into all the relationships of men. This new science gives the key to social order. It is the discovery and classification of the social system, and like all science has the last simplicity.

PROGRESS IN THE NEWS BUSINESS WAITS UPON THIS ACTION

The reporter is everywhere, but the news traffic has lacked a governing principle through which all parts of the news system could trade together and so develop co-operation on all sides. The General News Office will communicate the needed principle to the entire news system. While scientific method has invaded other divisions of commerce, its entrance and control in the news field has waited upon the development in science which underlies the General News Office. The modern economies, which have transformed other lines of business, are now to be applied to the commerce of letters. The present advance in co-operative reporting involves a universal application of the organic principle. This principle has been lacking in the Associated Press.

A CENTRAL BUREAU OF INFORMATION

The General News Office is ready to supply the particular needs of individuals, firms or corporations for information concerning New York's municipal affairs. Clients will be registered on payment of fees, varying according to the range and extent of their business. Reports will be made by telephone when so desired. In fact, the entire local news system will be on the telephone, so that any part of it can be called up at will. The General News Office is a universal bureau of information. Its service is on the engineering, legal, or professional level.

ORDER AND ECONOMY IN THE LOCAL NEWS SYSTEM

During recent years the growing demand in New York for comprehensive inquiry into municipal affairs has been met in a partial way through the rise of all manner of societies and reform clubs. Numerous information bureaus operating under the profit-seeking principle are also in the local field. The combined yearly money collections of the reform societies and the commercial bureaus are hardly less than \$500,000. The General News Office will bring the two sides of this confused system to a working unity by introducing a directing and organizing idea. It will bring order and economy into the local news system. The new revenues which have arisen will be developed and utilized for legitimate news gathering. The varied functions will be classified, and each will be stimulated to increased usefulness in its peculiar field. The advent of a science of politics will enable the University centre to co-operate in practical inquiry. A radical advance in the organization of credit news is involved. The municipal system

abounds in credit news, all of which will be extracted and placed at the service of the business public. The recognition of a news system, with a free trading relation between its parts, is a necessary prelude to the further growth of independence on the part of the daily newspaper.

DAILY BULLETINS OF MUNICIPAL NEWS

As soon as its revenues will permit, the General News Office will issue to members or subscribers daily bulletins of municipal news. An authoritative and universal publicity concerning city business will result. The point to be grasped is that the general publicity which is demanded in this field cannot be attained without first collecting, classifying, and reporting the municipal facts from the technical point of view in order to meet the needs of all interests and all classes. The publication of a Municipal Yearbook is proposed.

MODERN COMMUNICATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE STATE

I should add that the conclusions set out above with respect to the Government of the metropolis and the necessary lines of its development are incidental to the larger work of the General News Office in deciphering the effect of modern communication on the organization of the State as a whole. With the conquest of distance, a new force, amounting to a fundamental alteration in conditions, has come into the world. It is the business of Science to interpret the new conditions for social guidance, and this the General News Office has done. It has in hand a series of public reports which, measured by the present political necessity, correspond to the achievement of Alexander Hamilton and his fellow publicists at the time of the adoption of the Constitution. In truth, the existing crisis in the American State may be compared to that of 1789, when the necessities of commerce led to a liberating advance in the organization of Government. The General News Office has carried forward the literature of politics and jurisprudence to the level of the great new action which is everywhere bursting forth in America. We are now face to face with the political outcome of the progress of the last century in the field of physical invention. The result is

the most important advance in actual Government since the invention of the representative principle. Startled by the great modern development of corporate activity, the foremost jurists of Europe are struggling to translate the new realities, but the light must proceed from America, where the free play of the principle of association under Contract has reached its highest development.

FRANKLIN FORD

Director