

Franklin Ford Collection

edited by
Dominique Trudel &
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edition



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FRANKLIN FORD COLLECTION

A MEDIASTUDIES.PRESS PUBLIC DOMAIN EDITION

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Contents

“He Has Ideas about Everything”: An Introduction to the Franklin Ford Collection *vi*

Acknowledgments *xlvi*

The Larger Life: A Poem Dedicated to Franklin Ford *xlix*

I Reforming the News

Draft of Action *3*

A Newspaper Laboratory *64*

Banding Together the Leading Newspapers *67*

The Press of New York—Its Future *68*

Organization of Intelligence Requires an Organism *71*

In Search of Absolute News, Sensation, and Unity *73*

The News System: A Scientific Basis for Organizing the News *107*

II Interconnected Flows: Money, Information, and Transportation

<i>Better Credit Reporting</i>	116
<i>Traffic Associations</i>	127
<i>The Country Check</i>	130
<i>The Express Companies and the Bank</i>	147
<i>The Mercantile Agencies and Credit Reporting</i>	155
<i>Co-operative Credit Reporting</i>	163

III News is Government

<i>City News Office Needed</i>	166
<i>Municipal Reform: A Scientific Question</i>	169
<i>Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News</i>	198
<i>The Simple Idea of Government</i>	206
<i>A New and Revolutionary Government</i>	208
<i>News is the Master Element of Social Control</i>	213

Organization of Intelligence Requires an Organism

JOHN DEWEY

Memorandum - John Dewey to Henry
Carter Adams, April 29, 1889 (doi)

MEMORANDUM

1. Newspapers should inquire into and report the actual state of things and this scientifically and systematically i.e. journalism must be organized.
2. This is impossible unless there is an adequate physical basis. There must be a machine equal to carrying it out. This is provided in printing-press, locomotive and telegraphs. The latter, by eliminating distance, make it possible to get outside of local interest and ignorance and to report the whole thing i.e. to centralize the intelligence of the country, and then to distribute it again.
3. Inquiry cannot be organized unless it is somebody's business to inquire - unless someone, that is, is making a living out of it. There is an immense amount of inquiry now in the country — economic (illegible) — government bureaus of statistics etc. but it arouses no spontaneous or selfish interest and hence can't insure integrity. The proposed organization of the newspaper will secure this.
 - a. It will be in the interest of every man in every business, say cotton, to tell what he knows about cotton in exchange for what everybody else knows.
 - b. The newspaper man will make use of this interest and charge for collecting and distributing the information. This business interest in inquiry and distribution of results will make the organization automatic.

4. Organization of intelligence requires an organism; differentiation of labor and corresponding centralization of differentiated parts. That is, the state of things falls naturally into a number of subdivisions. Say Food, Textiles, Mineral Products, Lumber, Distribution, etc. Each of them again subdivides. There would be an organ for each subdivision under Food—Wheat, Meat, Vegetables, and then a central journal covering the whole field in its relations, and so on up to the top. The beginnings of this already exist in the trade-journals.
5. Intelligence or publicity is thus made a *commodity*. The newspaper now has something *to sell*. The newspaper business is the publicity business. This is the essence of the whole thing. The newspaper thus gets a position—it has a function which defines it. Any number of reforms over present newspapers grow out of this fact.
6. That which finally touches everybody is the public thing—politics—the state of the social organism. The newspaper, in giving publicity to public matters (not for reform, or for any purpose excepting that it is its business to sell facts) becomes the representative of public interests. Thus Ford says the municipal question is essentially a publicity question. No paper can afford now to tell the truth about the actual conduct of the city's business. But have a paper whose *business* i.e. whose livelihood, was to sell intelligence, and it couldn't afford to do anything else, any more than any genuine business can afford to sell spurious goods.