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Public Charities, Dept.  
of-Pamphlet Distribution

1913





Department of Finance  
City of New York

William A. Prendergast, Comptroller

November 6, 1913.

Honorable Ardolph L. Kline,  
Mayor,  
City of New York.

S i r :

With this letter I am handing you a copy of a printed pamphlet called "The Truth about the Attack on the Charitable Institutions", signed by Michael J. Drummond, Commissioner of Charities. On Sunday, November 2, 1913, copies of this pamphlet were distributed at a number of the Roman Catholic churches throughout the City of New York. This was done without the knowledge of the authorities of the Catholic Church, and in a number of cases where the pastors of the churches were informed that the pamphlet was being distributed, they personally ordered the distributors away.

The pamphlet was undoubtedly circulated on Sunday at the churches by either the Democratic Campaign Committees or people acting for them. This pamphlet is a mass of mis-statements and falsehoods. Even if it were truthful I would like to ask you by what right does the Commissioner of Public Charities sign such a document as a public official? If Mr. Drummond in his individual capacity wishes to oppose me as a candidate for public office, or oppose any man in whose election I am interested, that is entirely his affair and I have no right to criticize him. But what possible right has he to prepare an attack upon two candidates for public office, especially a maliciously untrue attack, and then sign it as a public official?

I am calling this matter to your attention because I believe that Mr. Drummond has committed a wanton infraction of official etiquette, and in addition to this has used his office for strictly political purposes.

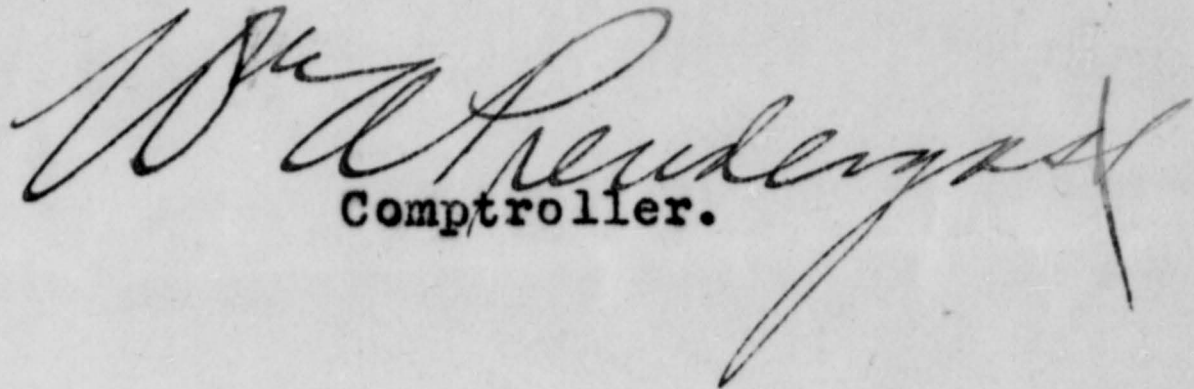
One of the newspapers this morning commented most admiringly upon the absolutely neutral attitude that you, as Mayor, had assumed during the recent campaign, and we were all glad that you did so because we had no desire to have the administration involved in political controversies. Mr. Drummond, however, has departed as far as he possibly

*Charities*  
*11/15/13*



could as a public official from the attitude assumed by you, his superior, regarding the campaign, and I am submitting the matter to you feeling that you certainly would desire to take due notice of it.

Respectfully,

  
Comptroller.





IN ANSWERING REFER TO

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC CHARITIES  
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
FOOT OF EAST 26TH STREET

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC CHARITIES, FOOT OF EAST 26TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MICHAEL J. DRUMMOND  
COMMISSIONER  
FRANK J. GOODWIN  
FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
THOMAS L. FOGARTY  
SECOND DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
STEPHEN A. NUGENT  
THIRD DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
J. McKEE BORDEN  
SECRETARY

*Finance*  
*11/15/13*

November 15, 1913.

Hon. Ardolph L. Kline,  
Mayor,  
City of New York.

S i r :



I respectfully submit this letter in reply to your letter to me of November 10, 1913, enclosing a letter of Hon. William A. Prendergast, Comptroller of the City of New York, dated November 6, 1913, and asking me for information regarding a pamphlet, which was enclosed in Mr. Prendergast's letter, and my acts in regard to it. The pamphlet is entitled "The Truth about the Attack on the Charitable Institutions".

I had nothing whatever to do with either its printing or its distribution. It does, however, contain a letter which I wrote on October 28, 1913, and gave to the press. I signed it with my name and my title of Commissioner of Charities.

The circumstances under which this letter was written and given to the press are these:

On October 24, 1913, in the midst of the canvass for the municipal election, Mr. John D. Crimmins wrote a letter which was published or noted in all the newspapers. It purported to give his version of and comment on the unhappy differences which arose in 1910-11 between the Finance Department and Mr. Prendergast, its head, on one side, and the managers of certain charitable institutions under private control which were receiving public moneys under the provisions of the Statutes. It was generally regarded as important matter for the campaign. The newspapers published it, in whole or part, in a prominent position and used such headlines as these: "Crimmins praises Prendergast's work." "Says Catholics are thankful that he made Institutions account to City." "Clear Prendergast on Catholic issue." "Crimmins says he deserves credit for his action." "Crimmins defends Comptroller's demand for accounting from Roman Catholic Institutions." &c. In his letter Mr. Crimmins flatly states, "There had been no proper accounting by the managers of these institutions and no satisfactory reports." "He", Mr. Prendergast, "insisted on a proper method and system of accounting." "When we", -- "my co-religionists", -- "understood and realized the purpose sought, that the business relations between the City and our charities should be accurately reported, we had no reason to be resentful but in my humble judgment should be thankful."

The statements of this letter surprised me. I was also indignant. Mr. Crimmins to my knowledge had had no active part in the business about which he was assuming to direct opinion. He was resting all his statements of fact on the





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IN ANSWERING REFER TO Hon. A. L. Kline, Mayor.

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Nov. 15, 1913.

reports and impressions of others. Some of the most important of them were untrue. For example he used the following language: "There had been no proper accounting by the managers of these institutions and no satisfactory reports." - "He (Comptroller) insisted on a proper method and system of accounting." "When we (the Catholics) understood and realized the purpose sought, that the business relations between the City and our charities should be accurately reported we had no reason to be resentful but in my humble judgment should be thankful."

I had been an active and interested Commissioner of Charities for over three years. I had been an active and interested manager of one of the most important private charitable institutions receiving the City's money, for many years before taking that office. My department's bureaus and I myself had passed officially on thousands of reports from such institutions. I was familiar with the established system of elaborate rules for such reports and the accounts they were required to contain. I knew that my approval, both as to matter and form, had been given to a vast volume of them preliminary to the Finance Department's audit and payment of them. I was aware that after approval seldom or ever were such reports returned by the Comptroller's office to the Charities' Department as erroneous or insufficient.

In addition to these things I had had an important official part in the events out of which the differences of opinion between Comptroller Prendergast and the charitable institutions grew. I had personal knowledge of them. I had met officially many of the managers and officers of these charities of all denominations in regard to these differences. I knew that Mr. Crimmins' letter with its inaccuracies of judgment and misstatements would be challenged by them. I was, in fact, almost immediately asked from several quarters to make the necessary corrections by a letter to the press. I prepared such a letter trying to make it accurate and fair.- I think I did so. Since the facts I referred to were obtained by me officially and my official conduct was, as is plain, gravely involved in the matter, I signed the letter using my title of Commissioner of Charities. You will see at once that the statements by Mr. Crimmins above cited, that before the Comptroller acted in the matter out of which the controversy with the charities grew that there was no proper method or system of accounts or satisfactory reports, constituted a grave reflection upon me officially because I had been all that time officially certifying for payment to the institutions \$400,000.- on monthly bills of which I was officially charged with the approval before the Finance Department would pay them. I, on my part, considered the accounting methods and the reports in good form and satisfactory for all substantial purposes. The State Board of Charities had long had rules on the subject as well as the Finance Department-which we all were bound to obey. If the charities were breaking them and I was officially complacent about their breach, I was guilty of serious official malfeasance in respect to a volume of payments which exceeded four and a half millions of the City's money every year.





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It was in that spirit and with that purpose that I wrote the letter whose publication and distribution by others without my aid or knowledge is now complained of.

Mr. Prendergast in his official letter to you speaks of the pamphlet complained of as being "a mass of misstatements and falsehoods" and "maliciously untrue". Such rhetoric might have been saved by him. The political campaign was over when he wrote it. He should have remembered that he was speaking of one of his colleagues in an important branch of the City Government who could not try the issue with him. To meet his challenge of the truth of the pamphlet now is of course impossible. I must be content to deny earnestly his charge of malice and of falsehood. My letter to the press was written in good faith, to set right the facts which I regarded as distorted and misstated by Mr. Crimmins and in the interests of justice and fair dealing as I saw them and finally as a defense of my official conduct.

Its printing and distribution in a political campaign by those who found it politically valuable- was certainly as fair as the use of Mr. Crimmins' letter by those similarly situated. As I have said I had nothing to do with those matters.

Any charge that may be made that I improperly used my official position by giving this letter to the press is not well founded. The only fact that lends color to it is that I used my official title in the signature. I had no intention or will of any kind to use my standing as a public officer in the political campaign in any way. I identified myself in a statement of facts known to me officially by the use of my official title. No other act on my part followed the presentation of the facts which I made in my letter to the press. My ideas of official etiquette in respect to political activities of public officers and especially in respect to courtesies due to you as my superior officer coincide entirely with your own. My record in the Department of Charities for nearly four years will bear this out completely. I regret that you have been burdened with the necessity of taking up the unpleasant matters which this letter discusses.

Respectfully,

Commissioner.

P.S. I return herewith Mr. Prendergast's letter with the accompanying leaflet.

Enclosure.