

The Ghost of U.D.C.

Nothing could have defined the tragedy of the Urban Development Corporation better than the recently announced results of the architectural competition for housing on Roosevelt Island, a project started in better days. For one thing, it refocused attention on the U.D.C.'s basic purpose, which has been too quickly forgotten in the fiscal crisis it is now going through. The *raison d'être* of U.D.C. and similar housing and development programs is to provide places for people to live in—people who would not otherwise have decent housing in the urban environment. It is shelter, not tax shelter, that is at stake.

The irony of the winning designs is that they clearly demonstrate that architects, encouraged by a concerned sponsor, are learning how to handle the exigencies of land, costs, and the scale of mass housing to create twentieth-century dwellings of humanity and community. Significantly, the competition produced four winners, not just one; but in the light of U.D.C.'s financial troubles, probably none will be built.

That is the crux of the matter. Somewhere, in government and banking circles, someone must deal with the real gut issue of U.D.C.: that it embraced a long-term social program in many ways not susceptible to conventional short-term financing. Whatever mistakes may have been made, this is central to the crisis. Even the current "solution" will do no more than complete ongoing projects; all new ones are to be dropped.

The basic problem posed by the U.D.C. is not just the failure of financing, or of management, or whatever the Moreland inquiry will produce as causes for insolvency. The real failure is the abdication of the social responsibility to house people, to build communities, to renew tenuous areas sociologically as well as physically, and to do so in a manner—both fiscal and environmental—that ordinary investment procedures simply cannot support.

If these needs are not to be served within routine business norms, it is obvious that other methods must be found—as they have been in other countries. The mandate is for society, not for the bond market, a fact that is still to be faced.