

The City's Priorities

Now that a choiceless New York is being forced to face cuts so deep and devastating that they will actually jeopardize the city's future, it is essential to ask whether these cuts are being made with a rationale beyond mere desperation. There is as yet little indication that administrative or organizational overhaul aimed at efficiency as well as economy has become a significant part of the process.

Critics are rightly appalled at the operational costs of New York's unwieldy municipal machinery. A conspicuous head occasionally rolls, but layers of middle-management fat go untouched. Counterproductive civil service and union practices are disastrous. It is no secret that the city's services are being axed brutally, particularly at paraprofessional and community levels where the adverse effect is the greatest, while patronage jobs are, broadly speaking, unscathed. Productivity is suffering in appalling proportion to the numbers eliminated.

The question is whether a city can function without genuine policies and priorities. Budget solutions are pointless without thorough policy and operational overhaul. The voters gave a clear indication of a desire for reform in their approval of the Charter revisions that the city administration opposed. And yet, for reasons politic and human, City Hall appears to resist significant change.

When the accountants are through, the real issue will still be how to make the city work, if it is to survive. New York's credibility will not be restored by fiscal stringencies alone; this is a crisis of confidence in government as well as in money management.