

## Down With the Savoy Plaza

The news that New York is to have another blockbuster like the Pan Am Building and that it is to be built on the city's most urbane and gracious midtown plaza stirs fear of a dismaying new plunge in the city's unrelenting postwar movement toward architectural mediocrity.

A large British investment trust plans to raze the Savoy Plaza Hotel and erect a metropolitan headquarters for General Motors on the site. "It promises to be," in the trust's words, "one of the most important construction projects of its kind in the world." It also promises to be a concrete threat to one of the city's few genuine claims to urban elegance—the handsome open square at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, at the foot of Central Park, where General Sherman rides confidently toward the tasteful luxuries of Bergdorf Goodman and the last of the grand hotels surround a landscaped fountain offering the waters of Abundance to grateful New Yorkers.

Not that the new building can't be a good one, or a suitable one in its setting. Seagram has proved that corporate palaces may be splendid additions to the city's theme. General Motors, when it built for itself in Michigan, had the late Eero Saarinen design a commercial complex acclaimed as an "industrial Versailles."

On this critical, central New York site anything but the best will spell catastrophe. This will be the first sizable breach by large commercial construction of a rare area of Old World style and distinction; there is too much danger it could be the beginning of the end.

The tragedy, of course, is that New York, unlike Paris or Washington, has no review rights on its main avenues or plazas. It is now up to the conscience, capabilities and sense of public responsibility of a group of private investors with no direct ties to New York to make or mar the city's face. New York needs no more cut-rate monuments like Pan Am. If the results of this gigantic undertaking are of less than landmark quality it will be an urban disaster.