

# Corrupt Construction

The City Council seems bent on killing or bowdlerizing a Building Code amendment aimed at curbing the corruption that has stigmatized New York's construction processes. This is a bill that the city cannot afford to sabotage; the alternative is perpetuation of a system that guarantees bribes and delays, with resultant higher building costs than anywhere else in the country.

The bill's enemies say it simply shifts the locus of graft from the city to the private sector by permitting certification of code compliance by architects and engineers. They also contend that it legitimizes payoffs by turning graft into professional fees to firms in league with contractors, as against the present practice of giving the money to an inspector under the table. But these assertions ignore the provisions of the proposal that fixes stiff penalties for false certification. The professional has everything to lose—his license, his reputation and access to all city work.

The one legitimate concern about the proposed amendment involves the method of policing private inspections under the next system. It is not enough to say that the Buildings Commissioner will have the legal power to do so, or that he intends to set up an élite inspection corps. An oversight or review system should be written into the law itself. There is also a still unmet need for upgrading the qualifications of city inspectors, who are clearly less expert than the practicing architects and engineers.

Pressures on the City Council are for a sordid and inadequate status quo, or an eviscerated reform. To continue to make it an outrageously expensive, difficult and criminal process to build in New York is hardly an answer to the city's problems. The City Council has a better answer at its disposal if it will act on it now.