

# Chaotic Culture

Cultural affairs in the Beame administration promise to be an oddly mixed bag. On the same day that City Hall announced a badly needed study of the city's cultural policies, it also made an appointment of a Commissioner of Cultural Affairs that has appalled the cultural community.

Irving Goldman's position as business head of the real estate-oriented Schubert theater organization, with its inevitable dealings with city agencies, has been publicly protested as a potential source of conflict of interest. At the least, it implies an inadequate objectivity or viewpoint in dealing with the needs—often at cross-purposes with commercialism—of the city's crisis-ridden arts institutions.

This matter has been thoroughly muddled by Mayor Beame's office, which endorsed the controversial appointment with irresponsible speed after cursory inquiries. It seems now that the Board of Ethics was never properly consulted at all. Even if the conflict-of-interest question had been properly resolved, there would remain the larger question of Mr. Goldman's qualifications. The inevitable conclusion is that the Mayor and his aides believe that since culture and campaign contributions both begin with a "c" there is some connection between them. The connection is so blatantly political that the cultural community's faith in the city administration has been badly shaken.

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This is all the more unfortunate because the committee the Mayor has set up to study the city's cultural workings and problems is an excellent one, and its objective of analyzing and correcting a chaotic situation is sound.

At present, there is no order or efficiency in the way the city deals with its cultural institutions. Of the approximately \$30 million the city contributes to these institutions, about 87 bureaucratic steps are required for its distribution and utilization, with projects taking up to five years and costing four times more than if they had been rationally administered in the private sector.

New York should consider a centralized municipal structure on the order of the National Endowment for the Arts or the State Arts Councils, to supervise and distribute coordinated funds. The usefulness of the money now given would be maximized, and an agency with a coherent policy and authority would have the leverage necessary to get matching private grants for public funds.

New York's cultural activities are the cornerstone of a vast range of businesses that reach to the very heart and reason for the city's existence. Its arts and entertainments are one of the bases of its identity, supremacy and attraction, not only for individuals, but for the corporations that are its financial lifeline. The improvement of cultural operations and funding is essential.