

## The City's Architecture

The New York Central and New Haven Railroads are again petitioning for permission to build bowling alleys in Grand Central Terminal, a proposal that was turned down by the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals a year ago to the applause of many architectural and civic groups.

Although refusal of the original plea was based on a technicality—the terminal is located in a restricted retail area and a bowling center would be a zoning violation — the public outcry was directed against the fact that the scheme would damage one of the city's more important architectural landmarks. The crux of the matter is a problem that continues to plague New York as the boom in building and remodeling goes on: the question of the city's architectural standards.

More and more the public accepts shoddy standards of architecture in new buildings as well as in the remodeling of old ones. This city has little new construction of which it can be proud. The few superior additions to New York in recent years have been outnumbered and overwhelmed by speculative commercial and residential structures of totally undistinguished design that add nothing to the city except more rental space. Since a city is the sum total of its architecture, they diminish rather than increase its reputation.

Zoning restrictions can only eliminate the worst abuses; quality levels must be encouraged by the conscious efforts of builders, architects, clients, and an aware and interested public. Britain has its "Anti-Uglies," a group of concerned citizens who protest bad new buildings by the surprisingly direct device of picketing them, and who actually have helped halt plans for at least one large-scale London horror.

In New York it would take a long picket line to go around some of our greater monuments to mediocrity. Much of this construction is at present beyond control. Nor can good architecture be legislated. But there will be no material improvement without city regulation of the fate of older landmarks (creation of a Landmarks Preservation Commission is awaiting the Mayor's action) and the setting of some official, enforceable standards for the design of new buildings, at the very least on important civic sites.