

# Building Corruption

That 95 businessmen and Building Department employees have been indicted for bribery in the wake of the city's construction industry scandals is a welcome development but no surprise. Nor is this any cure for practices that vary only with administrations and the seasons in one of the most time-honored sources of graft in government.

Neither jail nor cynicism is the final answer. The process of construction in New York is complicated, time-consuming and strewn with temptations on both sides. Corruption is built into the system—as evidenced by the fact that those indicted include nearly two-thirds of all the city's construction inspectors assigned to the Borough of Manhattan. The real problem is time; delays cost money and boost costs. Time is bought and paid for in the form of inspections, approvals, permits and certificates.

Legislation in preparation now could promise corrective action. In a basic reform, builders would be able to certify code compliance through their architects and engineers, rather than be held to step-by-step municipal approvals. But the other root cause of delays, the labyrinthine maze of agencies and procedures to be dealt with in New York, needs ruthless analysis and streamlining—an unlikely process within the political protectorate.

Most important, because it underlies the rest, is the current adversary relationship that exists between the city and the builder. It is an atmosphere in which holdups and payoffs thrive at every point where they meet and until those points are reduced or eliminated and attitudes altered, nothing will improve. The construction process must be dealt with as a public service, not just as a police power. Without basic reform, it will continue to be the source not only of corrupt practices but also of the disgracefully increased costs of building that are borne by all New Yorkers.