

# Creeping Sloth

Mayor Koch has declared this to be New York City cleanup week. After a three-month tugboat strike, during which the layers of litter and garbage have settled like the strata over Schliemann's Troy, the Mayor is right to tell us it's time to begin polishing the big apple. We'll have to dig it out first.

The Sanitation Department's efficiency is not being aided by short hours and half-filled trucks, nor by its deteriorating equipment and low morale. The dog waste law is again being evaded. Trash baskets are becoming as rare as a clean street, and when you find one it's likely to be more than full. A bad situation was made infinitely worse with the suspension of alternate-side-of-the-street parking and normal trash pickup during the tugboat strike.

Even sadder than the mess is the way New Yorkers appear to have become inured to it. This is a city where people adapt to difficulty, but there is nothing either admirable or stoic about learning to live with record amounts of garbage. The adaptation is simply a more genteel kind of sloth. Litter need not become a way of life.

If it does we're in trouble: When New Yorkers lower their expectations of cleanliness, then the urge to regain what's lost seems to slip away too. The time has

passed, for instance, when shopkeepers and the superintendents of even modest buildings swept and often washed their sidewalks. As such niceties disappear, through emergency or abuse, they become harder to restore.

The Mayor cries "Shame!" but shame is out of style. The city needs tougher answers. One would be stricter sanitary laws and enforcement. Increased fines for littering — fines that would be processed by the Environmental Control Board rather than the courts — are an excellent idea. So is the new "nail and mail" summons law; waiting to be signed by Governor Carey. Instead of having to serve elusive property owners in person, it would suffice to post a notice of violations and mail a summons.

Moreover, if cleanliness is next to godliness, why not encourage New Yorkers to make a trash-can bid for immortality? Personalized litter baskets may never become a status symbol, but a few groups, including the New York Theater Owners and Producers, have already put out their own labeled trashcans, and to good effect. Block associations and neighborhood groups might consider participating in a widened version of the same sort of scheme — and as a continuing activity, not just a crash trash program.