

Architecture

Beating The System

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IN one way, this week's election makes very little difference to New York.

Every administration becomes the creature of its bureaucracy. Mayors come and go and the municipal machinery—timeless, civil-serviced, pensioned—grinds on, reducing progress to a pulp.

It takes strong men and strong ideas to beat the system. Today we give you the case history of a building that finally did it after 10 Machiavellian years: the \$45-million police headquarters superblock now in construction near City Hall.

The new police headquarters, including a new public parking garage and a new pedestrian plaza, is a Department of Public Works undertaking, capital budget projects Nos. PO-57, TF-423 and HW-118, for the Manhattan Civic Center of the City of New York. It will be bounded by Park Row, Madison, Pearl and a new street. It has been approved by the Department of Traffic, Department of Public Works, Commissioner of the Police Department, Director of the Bureau of Building Design and Assistant Director of Building Design.

The architects are Gruzen and Partners and the landscape architects are M. Paul Friedberg and Associates. Previously the architects were Emery Roth and Sons and Matthew Del Gaudio, then Kelly and Gruzen and Emery Roth and Sons. Firms are born and die, grow up and marry, and play musical chairs, in the time it takes such a project to go through.

There are several important things about this particular project. It is huge; in design quality it is light years beyond the New York City norm; it is part of an over-all Civic Center plan by Conklin and Rossant (architects of the Lower Manhattan Plan) that attempts to pull together what may be the world's worst municipal planning

mess; and it is being built. Every step of the way has been a fight to yank the building out of the city stereotype and to apply some basic principles of planning, design and common sense to its conception and execution. This has had to be done against a stacked set of built-in bureaucratic odds.

The job has been done. It took a decade and seven Public Works Commissioners, of whom three died — there seems to be an inordinately high mortality rate among Public Works Commissioners — to get the building out of the ground.

It should be made very clear that a lot of the effort was expended toward producing a better building than the New York system permitted, as well as toward getting the system moving. There were also such habitually-ignored factors involved as relationships to other municipal structures, parking and road patterns. The mediocre or routine can be built by the city in only a few years more than it takes for normal, private sector construction; anything good takes much longer. It has to break every rule and revise every procedure of the stagnant status quo.

This was finally achieved through a massive dose of administrative power by the Lindsay administration. (That is the lesson, for anyone looking for it.) It took a Special Assistant to the Mayor to Expedite the Police Headquarters, Richard Bader; the Director of the Lindsay-created Office of Lower Manhattan Development, at that time Richard Buford; and an Assistant to the Mayor for Police Policy Matters, Jay Kriegel, to pull the city's bureaucracy together and push the project through.

What Mr. Bader expedited was the coordination of the classic obstacle race through the department fiefdoms con-

trolling streets, highways, sewers, gas and electricity, the Bureau of the Budget, the Bureau of Building Design, the frustrated client, the Police Department, and the city's building agency, the Department of Public Works. This involved a snake dance of getting submissions into and approvals out of the assorted autonomous agencies.

Given this incentive from the top, departments and architects worked valiantly together. The decisive speedup that took place in the last three years, say the architects, "was unparalleled in any previous generation." Since this is a firm that has done work with the city for two generations now, it should know. Precedent also indicated that the job would have taken eight-and-a-half years after final site and budget decisions. It was compressed to a five-and-a-half-year period.

All this went on to background music of professional and citizen protest about the Topsy quality of the city's chaotic building program in the Civic Center. It has been a half-century of the stumbling surrealism of non-plan, with ludicrous confusions in siting and circulation, and we recommend it to those currently promoting non-plan as a fashionable thesis. Protest resulted in one major study, the so-called ABC report by

Abramovitz, Breines and Cutler in 1962, and finally the hiring of Conklin and Rossant for the coordinated Civic Center plan of 1966. Each study stopped everything dead. And each one resulted in major revisions.

The site was moved from one just adjacent to the present location, with an intervening paper shift by the ABC report, a slight rejuggling in 1964, and readjustment again in 1967. It expanded from 526,000 to 550,000 net square feet between 1960 and 1965, and ended as 917,861 gross square feet in 1969, including a parking garage. By charter requirement, new contracts had to be negotiated with each site change.

After five years, the program was totally revised by the Police Department in 1965.

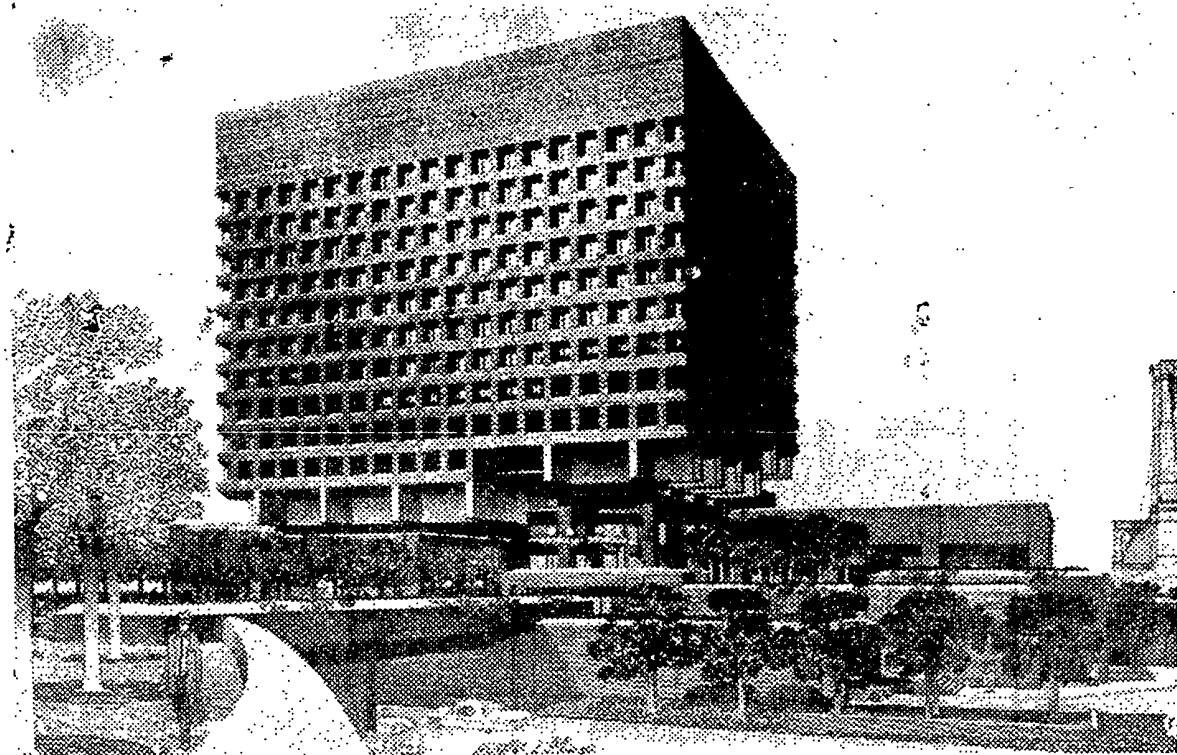
The budget went from \$18-million in 1960 to \$20-million in 1962, \$21-million in 1965 and \$30,500,000 in 1969. By the time four separate construction contracts were negotiated — another city requirement — their cost came to \$44,800,000, pushed up by a decade of rising construction costs and a vastly enlarged project. (It should be noted that the slowdown and expense of multiple contracts is considered a check against municipal crookedness, always endemic.) The archi-

ects only managed to keep in the black because of the fees for redoing the job so many times.

Design improvements focus on the near-miraculous rescue of an atrocious site, stuck almost literally in a hole behind the Municipal Building near the Brooklyn Bridge, framed in bridge-approach spaghetti. The solution is to depress Park Row, with a raised plaza-overpass joining the new police headquarters and the Municipal Building, which flanks City Hall. The architects comment that a few years before the city would have found such a radical design "unthinkable," particularly in the "realistic time period" in which it is now being carried out.

Between 1959 and 1969, the building has been through three architectural firms and two or more design incarnations. Parenthetically, it should be mentioned that a new municipal building was projected, and the design paid for, on the same site, previously. New York has a habit of buying its buildings over and over. Bureaucracy is incredibly expensive.

And that is how the first major civic structure in approximately 40 years got designed and is being built by the City of New York. As we said, administrations come and administrations go, but the system goes on forever.



New police headquarters in construction for New York's Civic Center
The lesson is a massive dose of administrative power