

# Restoring Central Park

While fun and games were being promoted in Central Park for the past eight years, the Parks Department has been sinking deeper into administrative and operational chaos. In spite of efforts at improvement made by earlier administrators, there is now a crisis situation that has the current regime on the ropes.

The present administrator, Edwin Weisl, is at least facing the problem openly. He is the first to admit the deplorable situation that independent reports are almost daily—and redundantly—revealing. However, his attempts at reform and overhaul are being received with conspicuous lack of interest at City Hall.

Mr. Weisl believes that the park's highest priority is conservation and rehabilitation, a position that has little political currency. All he has on his side right now is common sense. At this time of fiscal crisis, with capital budget projects being cut back drastically and existing contracts held up, any available funds should go into the park itself for desperately needed first aid.

Currently the Parks Department suffers from serious understaffing, severe money problems and abysmal non-productivity reinforced by classic bureaucratic inertia. Under these conditions neither maintenance nor creative programing is possible, but some remedial efforts are being made. An emergency pruning program has been started. Contracts have been let for rehabilitation of the southeast section, one of the most heavily used areas. Other contracts are inexplicably delayed. The proposed rebuilding of the Wollman rink, which will be held up with other building projects because of shortage of funds, is necessary largely because of park abuse.

The park has been subjected to every indignity from apathy to exploitation. The top priority now is clearly to get things moving, in physical rehabilitation and in administrative improvement. Above all, limited resources should be concentrated on restoring the landscape—that neglected and ravaged masterpiece of design and delight on its way to total ruin. The first task is to save the park.