

# They're Razing a Storm Over Tweed Courthouse

By ROBERTA B. GRAYZ and GEORGE ARZT

The expected decision by the Beame Administration to demolish the old Tweed courthouse behind City Hall could turn into the biggest architectural controversy since the demolition of Penn Station.

Opposition based on esthetics and economics is com-

ing from both outside and inside the administration.

"This is just not the time to tear down buildings of that quality of construction," said architect Tim Prentice, president of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

"The whole professional and public movement in the last few years," Prentice

added, "is toward conservation, especially in this market of skyrocketing construction costs. That building could be refurbished for a fraction of what it would cost to replace it."

A special Administration task force has been considering for several months the fate of the 105-year-old building, long a controversial

monument to municipal corruption. A copy of the preliminary report drafted by the eight-member task force was leaked to The Post this week by someone who is not a member of it.

The report suggests that renovation of the Tweed building would be "substantially more costly" than building a new City Hall

annex on its site. The final report is expected to be delivered to the Mayor in the next few weeks. It is further expected that the Mayor will accept the group's suggestions.

No "Preconceived Notions," called the Manhattan Civic Center Task Force, the blue-ribbon panel was headed by Municipal Service Administrator John Carroll. Observers viewed the high-power nature of the members of the task force as an effort by the Administration to set support for a predetermined decision to demolish and rebuild.

A spokesman for Carroll said however, that Carroll embarked on the study with "no preconceived notions."

Other members included City Planning Commission Chairman John Zonoli who, sources said The Post, initially favored preserving the courthouse but was persuaded to change his mind, Transportation Administrator Michael Lazar, Budget Director Melvin Lechar, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, designated director of the Office of Lower Manhattan Development of Claude Shestak and Parks Administrator Edwin Wiesl Jr.

Wiesl disagreed with the committee's preliminary recommendation and wrote a letter to that effect to Carroll that was not seen by other members except Deputy Mayor James A. Cavonius.

"Are we to continue to disfavor the Tweed building because of its association with the political leaders who were responsible for its construction?" Wiesl asked in his letter.

"If that argument is accepted then, for instance, the Arch of Titus in Rome should be demolished because it commemorates the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem," Wiesl noted, adding: "I suggest that New York City cannot in good conscience destroy part of its civic heritage."

#### Board Not Consulted

City Council President Paul O'Dwyer noted angrily that he was "totally opposed to destruction" of the courthouse and said that "to knock it down because of previous corruption is folly."

"This matter never came before the Board of Estimate nor were members of the Board consulted or asked their opinions," O'Dwyer added. "It is not within the competence of the mayor to allocate millions of dollars on this project."

Tweed's courthouse, originally estimated to cost about \$50,000 when plans were approved in 1858, eventually cost the taxpayers between \$5 and \$12.5 million when completed in 1871.

Contemporary accounts said the ring, headed by Tammany Boss William Marcy Tweed, and including the Mayor and Controller, stole about three-quarters of the final cost, using a rather simple kick-back scheme involving inflated contracting bills.