

# Editorial

Sunday, Jan. 29, 1978

## The public trust suffers

The MetroPoll results in today's news columns present some stark conclusions. They deserve serious consideration, for they show:

- Most Chicagoans believe government corruption here is widespread.
- About half those polled think high-level officials are involved in corruption.
- About half doubt that local government will act to stop the wrongdoing.

Those findings by an independent poll on responses to this newspaper's Mirage series support a point



we've made repeatedly on this page:

The price officials here must pay to help revive public confidence is to set up an unbiased, outside commission to investigate the corruption fully documented by The Sun-Times and the Better Government Assn.

But the City Council ducked its duty two weeks ago when it voted 39 to 3 to shunt off to committee a plan to do just that.

That sensible proposal deserves support.

Mayor Bilandic's own responses to the Mirage reports encourage public doubt about how forcefully the city will act. For example, Bilandic said Jan. 12 that his administration had disciplined or fired city employes for wrongdoing in 400 cases last year, implying some were guilty of corruption. Yet repeated efforts by Sun-Times reporter Michael Flannery have been unable to pull supporting facts from Bilandic's office.

Indeed there are two major problems:

- The corruption itself. Serious misdeeds — including payoffs and kickbacks — occur too often. Reporters Pamela Zekman and Zay N. Smith, with BGA investigators, found "business by bribe" considered a common practice in Chicago during the months they operated the Mirage, a N. Wells St. tavern.
- The public's lack of confidence. Though officials deny widespread corruption among city inspectors, the MetroPoll reveals three out of four Chicagoans think otherwise.

Against such broad distrust, Bilandic's order to establish a City Hall unit to investigate charges against city inspectors and his naming of close associates to rewrite city licensing laws won't do.

But the proposal that the Council banished to committee fills the bill on both counts.

Urged by Aldermen Martin J. Oberman (43d), Ross W. Lathrop (5th) and Dick Simpson (44th), it would have the Council create an independent blue-ribbon panel with powers to investigate the Mirage disclosures and take other steps, from examining the Chicago Building Code for unrealistic provisions to recommending management reforms.

If city government has nothing to hide, there's no reason to delay that effort.

Call the resolution back from its committee grave. Then do what's needed to curb corruption and help rebuild trust in government.

Approve it.