

THE CITY HALL INVESTIGATION

The grand jury's investigation into spot zoning, garbage contracts, paving, street lighting and other city public-works affairs will be prosecuted with a fervent hope on the part of citizens and taxpayers that the inquisitorial body will have better luck in getting out the facts than other agencies have had in the past.

There is not much doubt in the public mind that all has not been on the up and up at the City Hall, but getting positive proof of delinquency on the part of any particular person is difficult. It is several years since anybody connected with a city administration has been caught with the goods, though there have been plenty of ugly suspicions.

The refusal of any official to answer questions before the grand jury is within his legal right, but should not be. A very simple law could cure such a situation. Let it be provided that any public officer or officer of the court (so as to include lawyers) who refuses to answer a proper inquiry by the grand jury shall thereby automatically forfeit office or right to practice, as the case may be, and justice will be considerably expedited. Such a provision would make officers and lawyers more careful of their conduct, or if they failed to be careful would get rid of them expeditiously, without interfering with the principle that no man can be forced to incriminate himself.

No public officer has a moral right to refuse to render an accounting of his actions, whenever he is called upon to do so by a proper public body. Being ready to tell all at any time is one of the obligations of the job and office should neither be sought or held by one not willing to comply with this condition.