

# The Vote

In New York:

## Everybody Was for the Bond Issue Except the People

Everybody was for the Transportation Bond issue: the Governor, the Mayor, good government groups, businessmen, labor unions, both major parties. Everybody but the voters.

So it was that last Tuesday—ignoring a last-minute Madison Avenue advertising blitz—New Yorkers went to the polls and slapped down the pols. In the process, they plunged the state and the city into a fiscal crisis of historic proportions; the likely results: a statewide cutback in essential services and an increase in New York City's transit fare.

In the wake of the bond issue's demise, the political pallbearers sought answers to some tough and important questions. Why did it happen? What will it mean to a state and city already strapped by austerity budgets—and, incidentally, to those unlikely partners in defeat, Governor Rockefeller and Mayor Lindsay? What can be done to avoid total disaster?

There were signs that the bond issue was in trouble even before the polls opened. The Governor personally called a newspaper office to complain about a story, and the Mayor called his Air Resources Commissioner, Robert N. Rickles, a "damn fool" and "a nut" for opposing the bond issue. In politics, as in sports, that's called "choking up."

But there was little advance indication of the extent of the bond issue rout. (It lost by 900,000 in a total vote of 4 million.) The proposition was supposed to do well in the city, particularly after the Governor and the Mayor made their much-publicized deal to use some of the bond proceeds to hold the transit fare at 30 cents. Instead it was defeated in Brooklyn,

Queens and Staten Island and just barely passed in Manhattan and the Bronx.

Upstate, where some trouble had been expected, it was a disaster. The

proposition was approved in only a handful of the 53 counties, most of them along the New York-Pennsylvania border where the Southern Tier Expressway is under construction with the bond issue proceeds to be used to finish the job. In the New York City suburbs, the bond proposal was trounced, even though there have been noticeable improvements on commuter railroads as a result of the last \$2.5-billion transportation bond issue approved in 1967.

Returning to form and disagreeing, the Governor and the Mayor in their Wednesday morning quarterbacking had different explanations for the defeat.

"This is a reflection of the national mood . . . the people don't want to take on new taxes," the Governor said. It was a vote for "belt-tightening."

The Mayor didn't see it that way. "The vote on the bond issue was a rebellion against concrete," he said. Many city residents believed that almost all rather than about half of the bond issue proceeds should have been earmarked for mass transit rather than highways. They had their counterparts upstate who didn't take kindly to voting for a bond issue to save the subway fare at 30 cents when they often pay up to 50 cents for bus fare.

Other politicians and the City Club spoke of a "credibility gap" on transportation stemming from many unfulfilled promises made in behalf of earlier bond issues in 1951 and 1967. The Second Avenue subway, for example, was first pledged 20 years ago. It still isn't even a hole in the ground.

The style of the "Vote Yes" campaign, some observers felt, had turned another kind of credibility gap into a mighty chasm. It had to do with the attitudes of New Yorkers toward their Governor and Mayor. One high Republican, who campaigned for the issue, said he encountered many voters who said: "If those two blankety-blanks are for it, something must be wrong."

Voters were treated to the sight of the Dynamic Duo riding up to subway stations in their chauffeured limousines for a little mixing with the masses on behalf of the bond issue. One politician suggested that the election-eve photograph of the Duo plus William J. Ronan, chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, straphanging amidst the photographers, probably cost the bond issue thousands of votes. "It was so patently phony," he said—more in anger than in sorrow.

Whatever the reasons, the bond issue went down like the Titanic. And it left state and city officials with a terrible sinking feeling.

The first installment of what another politician called "Son of Fiscal Crisis" began hours after the vote was counted and only a few months after the latest fiscal dramas in Albany and New York City had been at least