

State Moves to Clean Up Single-Room 'Chamber of Horrors' on West Side

By MAX H. SEIGEL

In a continuing campaign to end the role of single-room-occupancy buildings as centers of crime, Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz obtained a court order yesterday directing the owners of West Side Towers, 230 West 76th Street, to show why they should not be restrained from operating the 600-room premises for illegal purposes.

The order, signed in State Supreme Court by Justice Gerald P. Culkin, is answerable Dec. 22.

Meanwhile the State Attorney General's legal action against the Kent Hotel, 31 West 71st Street, appeared to have borne fruit. A court order obtained on Dec. 4 directed the owners to evict undesirable tenants, and yesterday the 102-room hotel was said to have only five residents left.

The hotel lease was sold

after the court order was issued, and the new lessees were not available for comment. But the superintendent said the building was being renovated to offer studio apartments.

Debit Becoming Credit

"Now it will be a credit to the block," he said, "instead of a handicap."

Robert Carroll, first deputy administrator of the city's Human Resources Administration, said those evicted from the Kent had moved to other single-room-occupancy facilities. When asked to which, he declined to say, adding: "They just scattered."

Local residents have been concerned that evicting undesirable tenants from one

building has done nothing more than to transfer them to other buildings in the area.

In papers filed in court yesterday, the Attorney General called the West Side Towers' three buildings—which have a common hallway and extend along the west side of Broadway the whole block between 75th and 76th Streets—"an incredible chamber of horrors" that has led to the demise of a once-vital section of the city.

'Nuisances' Listed

He asked that the court appoint a receiver to evict all tenants engaged in unlawful activity and that the owners be required to hire three armed guards to serve 24 hours a day every day until the court determines that "the public nui-

sances alleged in the complaint have been abated."

The "public nuisances" mentioned in affidavits from 71 members of the community, included the following charges:

¶ That pedestrians on the sidewalk in front of the premises have been hit by paper bags containing human excrement and urine, and that the bodies of dogs and humans have been seen flying out of windows.

¶ That "junkies" openly inject narcotics and loll in front of the building and that narcotics are sold openly.

¶ That pimps and prostitutes accost passersby practically 24 hours a day and that crapshooters block the sidewalk.

¶ That knifings and clubbings take place every day and that some businessmen in the neigh-

borhood are giving up hope of being able to continue in business.

"This relentless, intolerable, notorious public nuisance maintained by the defendants," the Attorney General said, "has had, and continues to have, grave effects on the health, welfare and safety of residents in the neighborhood."

The Attorney General's complaint identified the owner of the premises as Minnie Smith, an elderly woman who held control through four corporations.

In a related development, Community Board 7, which covers the West Side, adopted a resolution on single-room-occupancy facilities at a meeting Tuesday night. Charging that the "task force" appointed re-

cently by Deputy Mayor Edward K. Hamilton to inspect and report on such buildings was too limited in membership and focus, the board called on Mayor Lindsay to deal with "root causes."

The board proposed that the Mayor appoint a task force of top-level officials to be responsible for "the provision of social services, health, hospitals, housing and other services needed by the S.R.O. [single-room-occupancy] occupant."

The board proposed in addition that the task force have a small staff, that it use voluntary as well as official agencies and that it come up within a year with a creative, coordinated program to meet the needs of persons living alone.

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