

## **S O S to Washington: Save Our City!**

**By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE**

Mayor Lindsay's recent announcement that New York's renewal funds will now be concentrated on "the three hard-core ghetto areas that are the shame of the city," Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and the South Bronx, is right in line with the recommendations of the city's Study Group on Housing and Neighborhood Improvement just made public.

But the news that went with the Mayor's decision—the fact that renewal projects in "more fortunate neighborhoods" will have to be dropped to permit an all-out attack on the city's sickest slums—made some bitter truths about New York's renewal policies and programs painfully and publicly clear.

First, there is the unpleasant reality of more than a decade of renewal efforts that have done pitifully little for the blighted areas where there is the most extreme and critical need. To attract private builders to renewal projects, the city has had to concentrate on fringe areas where improvements would mean profits for developers. One hard truth that is being faced much too late is that this kind of program often pushed out the poor, failed to replace bulldozed stocks of low and middle income housing, substandard or not, and left the hard-core slums virtually intact.

Second, it is tragically obvi-

ous to anyone who has taken an extended tour through the appalling expanse of New York's ghettos that normal-scale renewal, with normally allotted funds, can only scratch the surface. This fact, and the equally obvious inadequacy of the Federal renewal assistance now available to the city, are particularly bitter truths known to New York officials and confirmed by consultants on urban affairs, to which Washington habitually turns a deaf ear.

### **Slipping Into Slums**

But the most deeply disturbing fact of all is that while the city must administer emergency first aid in the most critical areas, and thus attempt to treat the whole destructive complex of social, economic, racial and environmental ills that stem from these cancerous cores, other parts of the city are dying.

There is no choice—the administration can only say, "Sorry," to those neighborhoods slipping into deterioration and decay, where a helping hand now means the difference between urban life and death.

Of the dropped areas, for example, Jumei is slipping into hard-core slum with all of the attendant human tragedy. Cooper Square, which has been working out its salvation with the city, is dangerously balanced at this moment between the possibility of a new stability or a

fatal, downward slide. Annadale-Huguenot was New York's only chance to lead the development of its last open land on Staten Island into patterns of orderly, creative growth instead of chaotic, speculative waste. Here even the future is lost.

Mayor Lindsay's evaluation of New York's physical ills at the recent hearings in Washington on the crisis of American cities was greeted as "totally unrealistic." The \$1.5 billion figure for urban renewal over a six-year period cited in the report of the Study Group on Housing and Neighborhood Improvement is already being criticized on the same grounds. The discrepancy between the Federal aid received by the city now—about \$50 million a year—and the carefully projected figure of the city's needs by independent, outside consultants is pointed to as evidence of fuzzy-mindedness. The figure may be shocking, but it is not unrealistic. There are no bargain-basement Great Cities.

Surely it is the Federal Government that is being unrealistic, and not this beleaguered city. At some point, it will be necessary for Congress to face the facts of the urban crisis and review and revise the current guidelines for Federal assistance. At the cities' end, on the other hand, if Federal assistance is to be meaningful, it must be backed by an equally realistic

battery of local resources, plans and solutions of the kind that would be required by the Demonstration Cities program as qualifications for aid. One thing New York's study demonstrates with definitive clarity is the evasive inadequacy of both municipal and Federal programs.

### **Funds, Not Rhetoric**

Finally, Congressional reluctance to enact strong Demonstration Cities legislation, and its reluctance to supply any price tag for the program, is most unrealistic of all. Even President Johnson's request for .0106 per cent of the Federal budget, rejected by Congress, is scarcely a figure that stuns. The only agency that grasps the scale and urgency of the urban crisis is the new Department of Housing and Urban Development, which can show a handful of dramatic proposals, but which thus far serves chiefly to prove that the Administration cares, because it is there.

What we have had, to date, is a splendid series of Presidential statements that have given this country the finest verbal urban program in the world. If it is to be more than just words, Washington must match rhetoric with funds. The objective of saving the cities is surely as urgent as reaching the moon; the crisis is as real as Vietnam.

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