

To Rejuvenate New York

New York, as everyone knows, is like no other city. Even the scale of its troubles is hard to grasp. Its slums are cities in themselves, and its ghettos are the most notorious in the country. More than one million people live in bad housing in declining neighborhoods.

New York's planning, renewal and housing programs have been notably ineffectual; the urgency of the city's physical needs is matched only by the inadequacy of its present plans. Nowhere else is the necessary administrative machinery so scattered and fragmented, and nothing short of radical reorganization will make it possible to stop the process of decay with its potential for explosive tragedy.

These are the tough, candid and uncompromising conclusions of the Mayor's Study Group on Housing and Neighborhood Improvement, in its long-awaited report just handed to Mayor Lindsay. Destined to be controversial, like the group's dynamic chairman, Boston Redevelopment Administrator Edward J. Logue, this is a straight-talking, hard-hitting, sobering document marked by sound professional analysis and penetrating insights supplied by consultant urban experts who have dealt with similar problems in other cities. There is a sense of crisis on every page.

There are also some startling facts and figures. To make any impression on New York's smoldering slums and decaying neighborhoods would require \$1.5 billion for urban renewal over six years and 15,000 new public housing units and 10,000 units of publicly assisted housing every year. Much of this aid would be concentrated in the most critical slum areas: Harlem and East Harlem; Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx.

To do the job, the report recommends the creation of a Housing Planning Development Agency to unify and mobilize all of the city's presently scattered planning, design, renewal, housing and construction activities. It would absorb many departments and functions. This central agency, in turn, would be served by ten area administrations carrying out projects at the local level, each of which is city-size itself.

This administrative recommendation is the crux of the study. It is not meant to be a comfortable and painless proposal for existing programs or personnel. Mr. Logue has never been known for pussyfooting, or the polite political gesture, and this is admittedly a highly controversial proposition. The stirrings of protest are already heard in city departments. Each is an individual fiefdom, and each fiefdom is a well-documented bottleneck to conception or execution of unified plans. At present, attack on a coordinated scale to approach the magnitude of the problem is an operational impossibility.

This excellent report can join many others in the city's archives. Or the Mayor can submit a home rule message to the City Council, and with City Council endorsement, ask Albany for necessary legislation. The first is not easily obtained, and the second is usually an exercise in frustration. But nothing short of city action and state law can reverse the city's physical, economic and human erosion. A sound city depends on a sound environment. The path from deterioration to blight to riot has become tragically clear.