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January 31, 1975

Mrs. Sylvai W. Stark
200 Central Park South
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mrs. Stark:

I am writing to you on behalf of the members of The League of New York Theatres and Producers, which consists of the Broadway legitimate theatrical producers and theatre owners.

My letter is addressed to you since you are a member of Community Board #5, and it is my understanding that you and the other members of the Board will be considering the question of converting obsolescent hotels in the Times Square area which have long since outlived their usefulness into hotels to be used for housing displaced, elderly, and indigent persons by undertaking some minimal restoration of these hotels. We understand that this program is the essence of "Project Find."

Obviously, Project Find and other social service agencies do not hold the only claim on genuine concern for the needs of the displaced, the deprived, and the elderly of our city.

The problem is not viewed by the legitimate theatre and should not be viewed by the people of Project Find in the polarized terms of the haves versus the have-nots. The theatre, commercial or non-commercial, generally deals with the problems of our time and the people of the theatre have a profound social awareness. They involve themselves in the problems of their community and the large contributions by theatre people of time, money, and talent to the whole spectrum of social causes is widely known and frequently exploited.

It is against this background that I would urge you to understand our opposition to the use of so-called Welfare Hotels in the Times Square area. An area such as this in the central city with no families, schools, play streets, no neighborhood orientation and no community activities or services is no place for the displaced, elderly and indigent to reside in comfort and dignity.

In fact, with the reality of the hotel deterioration, with its attendant contribution to the deterioration of the area and its now worldwide poor reputation, the proposed residents of these hotels will be subject to the threat of bodily harm and physical and emotional humiliation from both within these hotels and from the streets without.

The plan, as proposed by Project Find, is ostensibly a short-term "solution" to eliminate some of the blight and obsolescence which surrounds the Times Square district. This solution is bound to fail since it will not eliminate but instead proliferate the basic blight that pervades the entire theatre district. Other ways of confronting the problem, e.g. zoning, obscenity law enforcement, new legislation, orientation of government officials, police, sanitation and the judiciary, to the importance of the area have affected a reversal of the trend of decay and must be vigorously pursued. The alternative is that the legitimate theatres will find themselves increasingly strangled and eventually forced to give up.

Specifically, with the closing or demolition of three hotels on West 47 Street, east of Broadway, the improvement on that particular block was immediately noticeable. Contrast this with the condition on West 45 Street, east of Broadway, where obsolete hotels, topless bars and massage parlors proliferate. Further, on West 44 Street, the Belasco Theatre was sandwiched between the Aristo Hotel and Hotel 123. With the closing of the Aristo, probably the most infamous of the prostitution hotels, and the substantial vacating of Hotel 123, the Belasco Theatre was encouraged to continue. A new program of the Belasco has since been undertaken to establish the first Broadway cabaret-type theatre.

We, therefore, urge you as a member of local Community Board #5, to undertake a program which will revitalize the Times Square area as a cultural center. This can be done through your Community Board, in cooperation with the League, the New York City Planning Commission, and the assistance of federal, state, and local authorities. Such a revitalization would include not only facilities for housing serving the needs of the community but also the concomitant commercial and recreational activities that accompany such housing. Through an overall planned approach, you will eliminate not only the obsolescent hotels but the pornography which saturates the Broadway district. It is a sociological certainty that with upgrading of the central city area, the fortunes of its residents and commercial occupants will equally rise.

On behalf of the Broadway theatre which is the well-spring for the entire Times Square district, we urge you to support a program for the complete rehabilitation and revitalization of our area and return it once again to its former position as the cultural center of the world.

Sincerely,

Irving W. Cheskin
Executive Director