

## Tenants Storm Illegal Hotel, Demand Return to Residential Use

*ILLEGAL HOTEL TOURS, Inc.*

by Tom Cayler

*On Sunday, February 11th, more than 100 West Side tenants and elected officials stormed the lobby of the Imperial Court, an affordable Single Room Occupancy building being used illegally as a hotel for tourists, to call attention to the*



*widespread conversion of affordable residential units into hotel rooms and announce legislation that will curb the problem.*

*The following is one tenant's experience. Tom Cayler is a resident of West 45th Street and a member of the West Side Neighborhood Alliance.*

We stormed the doors to the Imperial Court. Assembly Members Linda Rosenthal and Richard Gottfried (As Pictured), Senator Liz Krueger, Council Member Gale Brewer and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer breeched the vestibule. Five cameramen and ten reporters rushed forward in their wake. One hundred and twenty citizens charged in behind. The Imperial Court's manager called the police. Within seconds, New York's Finest ordered us OUT!

We retreated, despite the fact that Assembly Member Rosenthal was a paying guest of the Imperial Court. Despite the fact that legitimate SRO residents of the Imperial Court had invited us to their rooms, we could not enter. Despite the fact that the Imperial Court, registered as an SRO, is illegally renting more than one third of its valuable and desperately needed affordable rooms to tourists, we were repelled.

After being ejected from the Imperial Court's lobby, the elected officials formed a phalanx across the sidewalk and announced new legislation to stop the erosion of affordable housing to rapacious landlords who have no respect for the law.

All over New York City, unscrupulous landlords, who know

the housing laws are weak and enforcement nil, are renting protected housing to tourists. SROs, rent stabilized and rent controlled units are all at risk. These illegal rentals deprive New Yorkers of affordable housing, forcing more and more middle- and low- income families and individuals out of the city. These landlords want to post a sign over every Manhattan apartment building: "Only the Rich Need Apply."

But New Yorkers are fighting back! A coalition of the West Side Neighborhood Alliance, Housing Conservation Coordinators and the West Side SRO Law Project staged this ILLEGAL HOTELS TOUR. The aforementioned elected officials are working to strengthen the laws and their enforcement.

We will win? We will be able to stay in our homes? Will we be able to protect the neighborhoods we've fought to improve? It is up to us.

Do you have illegal hotel rentals in your building? Tourists and luggage clogging the elevators? Legitimate tenants thrown out of their apartments? Then join us. Do you fear that your neighborhood will become a bastion for the rich? Do you worry that some day you won't be able to pay your rent? Then join us. Call John Raskin at HCC, 212-716-1665, to request a membership form and find out when our next meeting is.

The ILLEGAL HOTELS TOURS will continue until The City puts a stop this. But always remember - The City is us. We need you.