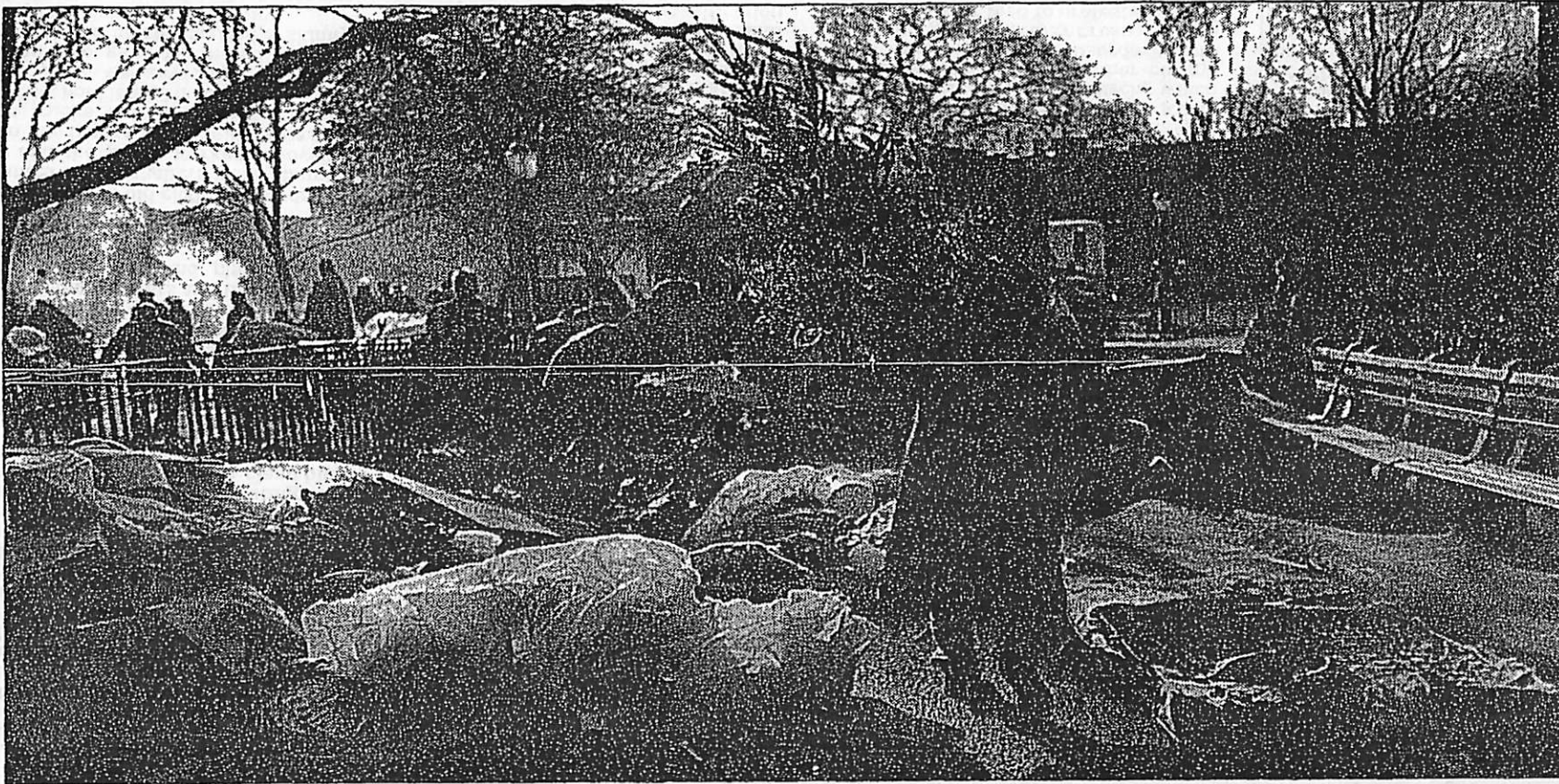


City in Tompkins Square Park Is Dismantled by Police

By JOHN KIFNER

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pg. B1



The New York Times/Neal Boenzi

Police officers tore down the tent city of the homeless in Tompkins Square Park yesterday. A homeless woman carried a Christmas tree and a teddy bear through the debris.

Tent City in Tompkins Square Park Is Dismantled by Police

By JOHN KIFNER

The ramshackle tent city of the homeless in Tompkins Square Park was torn down yesterday as scores of city and park police officers mounted a long planned, long announced operation of nearly military complexity.

The 10-acre park was aswarm with green-uniformed park officers wearing white riot helmets, police officers in blue, two fire engines and 15 big green Parks Department trucks hauling away the debris.

A small group of protesters set about 20 of the makeshift shelters on fire and by mid-morning acrid smoke hung over the park. But there were no serious clashes.

The removal of the shelters came after increasing complaints from residents of the Lower East Side neighborhood that they could no longer use the park and that the encampment had become a center of drug use and prostitution.

Parks and police officials stressed that in accordance with community sentiment Tompkins Square would continue to be the only park in the city without a curfew and that homeless people would still be able to sleep there overnight.

"If they want, the homeless people can come back later with blankets and sleeping bags. They just won't have the structures," said Deputy Inspector Michael Julian, commander of the Ninth Precinct, as several

protesters closed in around him, chanting "Sleg Hell" and "New York City, you can't hide; we charge you with genocide."

At nightfall, about two dozen demonstrators were still clustered around the benches in the middle of the park, chanting "No housing, no peace." They were watched by about a dozen city police officers and two dozen parks officers.

Draped in Blankets

At midnight, the park was relatively quiet. Twenty-five homeless people gathered around fires in trash cans, blankets draped over their shoulders against the 18-degree weather. Police officers stood nearby.

One homeless man, who gave his name

only as Vinnie, said: "We're going to rebuild Tent City. Until they come up with a better alternative to city-run shelters, we're going to stay."

On the west side of the park several men slept under blankets on the sidewalk, surrounded by piles of belongings. At Ninth Street and Avenue B, two tents were set up in a small vacant lot owned by the Trinity Lower East Side Lutheran Parish and hung with Christmas lights.

When the clearing operation began at 9 A.M. there had been about 90 homeless people and 45 shelters in the park.

Inspector Julian had spent part of

Continued on Page B6

Tent City in Tompkins Square Park Is Torn Down

Continued From Page B1

Wednesday going through the park from shelter to shelter telling the inhabitants that the eviction was coming and that they should gather their possessions. Before the operation started, parks workers distributed plastic bags to hold belongings.

Assistant Parks Commissioner Jack T. Linn, who directed the operation, said the Department of Parks and Recreation had 80 of its peace officers, who are called the Parks Enforcement Patrol and dress like park rangers, on the scene, along with 90 maintenance workers, eight video and still photographers to record the event and three lawyers to give advice.

The park was divided into six sectors, Mr. Linn said, and a team was sent into each, backed by two city police officers. Each structure was to be photographed and the inhabitants told that if they had possessions too heavy or awkward to carry away, the items could be recorded and stored by the Parks Department for 30 days.

Inspector Julian began with 20 uniformed police officers in the park, he said, quickly building up to 40. Another 30 officers were held in reserve. There were also a number of plainclothes officers, some of them readily distinguishable by their athletic builds, clean blue jeans and baseball hats.

A core group of about a score of homeless people and their supporters set fire to about a half-dozen tents and shelters in the center of the park and then moved about chanting slogans, waving protest signs and beating a large drum. More fires were set later.

The demonstrators and the parks officials videotaped and photographed each other.

A Call for More Trucks

Huge piles of old clothing and debris mounted as the shelters were dismantled and the parks workers shoveled them into trucks. The original five garbage trucks and five flatbed trucks could not hold it all, Mr. Linn said.

"At least we saved our tree," a woman who gave her name only as Barbara said as she carried a skinny decorated Christmas tree away.

Mark Timerow, who lives nearby and called himself a "squatter support-



The New York Times/Sara Krulwich
After police officers dismantled a tent city in Tompkins Square Park yesterday, homeless people went through the debris in search of their belongings.

er," said: "The sickness of doing this on the coldest day of the year, just before Christmas, is despicable. It means that without shelters, some of these people will die.

"This is the military solution to homelessness," Mr. Timerow said. "We should look on this as the first official act of the Dinkins administration." Mayor-elect David N. Dinkins said on Wednesday that he supported the clearance.

Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern said that in the three weeks that a social-service center had been operating in the park as a part of the plan to remove the shelters, some 127 people had been placed in shelters, detoxification programs or hospitals.

"It went very smoothly," Mr. Stern

said of the clearance. "Many of the people left beforehand."

Seventeen people were arrested during the day but there no major incidents, a police spokesman, Lieut. Raymond O'Donnell, said. Three people were arrested in and around the park during the clearing operation. Eleven others were arrested on charges of trespass, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest when the protesters left the park and tried to occupy a vacant apartment at 343 East 10th Street.

In addition, the Rev. George Kuhn, pastor of St. Brigid's Church, which faces the park, and two other clergymen were arrested on disorderly conduct charges when they crossed police lines to deliver food to protesters holed up since the weekend in an abandoned school at 271 East Fourth Street.

By afternoon, as a religious group set up its regular soup kitchen in a truck near the band shell and the teams of parks workers raked up the litter left from the encampment, two elderly women, both with canes and worn, heavy overcoats, took the thin sun on park benches.

They had each lived in the neighborhood for more than 50 years, they said, and they debated the day's events in East European accents.

"The park is beautiful," said one. "I hope it stays this way."

"But where's the humanity," asked the other. "They should be doing something to take care of these people. I don't think it's fair to throw these people out on the street."

"It was awful around here," came the response. "Who's she kidding?"