

Fire Bombing Severely Damages Offices of Farmworkers' Union

A week of mysterious harassment that began with rock throwing culminated yesterday in a fire bombing that severely damaged a West Side building used by the United Farmworkers of America.

Neither union officials nor the police could suggest any reason for the attacks against the building, which serves as a headquarters where the union has arranged boycotts against grapes, lettuce and wine, among other products. No one was reported injured.

For seven days, according to Dave Dyson, the union's regional director, rocks and golf balls had been thrown—usually at night—through windows of the five-story brownstone building owned by the union at 331 West 84th Street, near Riverside Drive. The building is the union's eastern headquarters and is home to 13 persons, including two children.

"On Saturday night at about 6," Mr. Dyson said, "we smelled smoke upstairs. We ran to the fifth floor. A window had been crowbarred open and the curtains were burning."

More Fires

An hour or so later, Mr. Dyson said, flames broke out in two rooms on the fourth floor and union members and fire investigators found seven places where the flames had started, little piles of debris that had been set afire.

Yesterday, we sat up with clubs and baseball bats all night, sitting by the windows, guarding the place," Mr. Dyson said.

Yesterday afternoon, after a weary night of guard duty, union members in a front room heard a noise in a ground-floor room at the rear next to an alley from West 85th Street.

"The room was engulfed in flames when we got there," Mr. Dyson said. "Smoke was pouring out." The room was used to store books and files.

Unfit to Live In

By the time firemen had poured water on the flames, Mr. Dyson said, the building was unfit to live in. Windows were broken. Walls were scorched. The odor of smoke filled the rooms and the floors were water-soaked.

He called volunteers from around the city to stay in the building and guard it overnight. The residents scattered to the apartments of friends in the neighborhood. Personal belongings and files were stored in nearby churches.

The farm workers have been in the building for about five years and, Mr. Dyson said, there had never been any similar trouble. Nor had there been any threats or any gloating references to the damage. It simply began about a week ago, mysteriously, with no hints of a motive.

The police of the 20th Precinct said that they were investigating, but that they had no immediate leads.

At the farmworker union's national headquarters in Keene, Calif., Marc Grossman, the executive assistant to the president, Cesar Chavez, said that union offices in 30 other cities had been notified to be on "special alert."

He said there had been no signs of trouble elsewhere nor did he have any idea what might have prompted the fuss in New York City.

Mr. Chavez sent a telegram to Mayor Beame asking protection for the site and an investigation into the "heinous threat."