

FIRE BOMB DAMAGES UNION HEADQUARTERS

Farmworkers Officials and Police Know of No Motive for Attack on West Side Building

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."

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 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 apartment of friends in the neighborhood.

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 hint of a motive.

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

At the farmworkers 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."