

6 BODIES IN ASHES OF RADICALS' HOME; ASSAULT DEFENDED

PHILADELPHIANS STUNNED

Mayor Vows to Rebuild More Than 50 Houses Destroyed After Police Bombing

By **WILLIAM K. STEVENS**

Special to The New York Times

PHILADELPHIA, May 14 — Firefighters found the bodies of six people today in the charred rubble of a radical group's house that had been leveled in a police assault that set fire to the surrounding neighborhood and destroyed more than 50 homes.

Mayor W. Wilson Goode, saying he was "devastated" by Monday night's destruction, said the city would rebuild the houses gutted by the blaze, which left 200 people homeless.

He defended the action against Move, a radical back-to-nature group, which had had a 90-minute shootout with the police nearly 12 hours before a bomb was dropped from a helicopter. Mr. Goode indicated that he would approve such a bombing again in a similar situation.

Bodies Not Identified

None of the dead found in the rubble of Move's row-house fortress in West Philadelphia could be identified this evening. Officials said there were two men, one woman, a fourth adult whose sex could not be determined, and two children, one of them a girl.

The fire that destroyed the bodies swept through two blocks of closely packed houses, destroying or extensively damaging 53 houses. Mayor Goode vowed to a group of burned-out residents to "make you whole again." He said the ruined homes would be rebuilt, free, within a year.

The intense heat of the six-alarm blaze, one of the worst residential fires in the city's history, melted cars nearly a block away. It collapsed the roofs and stripped the facades off houses, leaving rows of unsupported walls standing.

Fire Called a Tragic Accident

As Philadelphians today expressed shock at the devastation and looked for explanations of what some called an insane episode, Mayor Goode called it the worst of all possible outcomes for a solid plan that went tragically awry. He and other city officials said the fire was an accident, that the bomb intended to bring an end to a 24-hour standoff was not an incendiary device. He later suggested that the fire might have been set from inside the house.

The police action was part of an attempt to evict fewer than 20 members of Move, a mysterious organization that shuns modern technology, preaches a revolutionary doctrine and

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Six Found Dead After Fiery Assault on Radicals

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has often been at odds with neighbors and the authorities.

People who lived nearby in the middle-class neighborhood said the group had accumulated an arsenal, built a rooftop bunker commanding the front of the building, kept dozens of cats, refused to pay utility bills and harangued the neighbors at all hours with obscene tirades over loudspeakers.

The Mayor said it was possible that some or most of the radical group's armed members had escaped through the police cordon.

After a similar siege at another house here in 1978, one police officer was killed and nine members of Move were convicted of murder.

Yesterday's action, which was initially prompted by the upset neighbors, was interpreted by some as a serious political setback to Mr. Goode, who has been credited with a successful record in trying to develop and promote a resurgent Philadelphia. But in a television interview tonight, the Mayor said he had received many calls and telegrams indicating support. "People want a strong leader, a decisive leader," he said.

For the moment, however, little attention was focused on that aspect as the city confronted the humanitarian problem of what to do about the 200 people rendered homeless. Mayor Goode told some of them today that the city would begin immediately to find them temporary places to live.

The spectacular fire, visible across the city, began about 5:30 P.M., after a 24-hour police siege of the Move house. A state police helicopter swooped over the house on Osage Avenue and, according to Police Commissioner Gregoire J. Sambor, a city police officer dropped a "square package," a specially fabricated explosive device, on the rooftop bunker.

Mayor Was Told in Advance

Both Commissioner Sambor and Mayor Goode said the decision to drop the bomb was the Commissioner's, although Mr. Goode said he had been notified in advance and had approved the action.

The Police Commissioner said Monday night that he had ordered the bombing because, after hours of at-

tempts to destroy the bunker with water cannons, he had concluded a bomb was the only way to knock it out. From that structure, he said, the heavy-caliber weapons of the Move members commanded the street and pinned down the police.

Mr. Goode said investigators suspected that the fire might have been set from inside the house, but he acknowledged that there was little evidence for such a suspicion and said he could not fathom a motivation.

There were unconfirmed reports that occupants of the house had stored gasoline on the roof. In view of what happened in the 1978 confrontation with Move, some politicians and residents interviewed today asked why the Mayor waited so long, after months of complaints by neighbors about the group, to take action.

Unpaid Utility Bills

Mayor Goode said last week that despite the harassment of neighborhood residents by Move members, there was no apparent basis for legal action against them. But he said that later research turned up arrest warrants for the members for housing-code violations and unpaid utility bills.

In a news conference today after he visited the Osage Avenue neighborhood, the Mayor said, when asked whether another solution might have been possible: "I don't know that we

could have done anything differently."

Everything worked, he said, until the bomb was dropped. "The thing we did not anticipate was that there would be a fire," he said, terming it an accident that no one could have anticipated.

In answer to another question, he conceded that the action in the end "may not have achieved its objective" because some of the Move members may have escaped. One woman and one 9-year-old boy who had been in the house were taken into custody, the police said. The woman was said to be in jail, the boy in a hospital.

Delay in Fighting Fire

Many citizens last night and today persisted in asking two basic questions: Why was it necessary to take the unusual, some would say bizarre, step of dropping a bomb on a residential neighborhood? And why was it so long before the Fire Department attacked the fire? One building owner in the burned-out neighborhood, Devore Arnold, said last night that the firefighters did not move for an hour and 40 minutes after they arrived.

Fire Chief William Richmond conceded today that "we did not aggressively attack that fire" because of the desire to protect firefighters from gunfire. Thousands of rounds of fire were exchanged during the day Monday. "We are firefighters," Mr. Richmond said. "We are not infantrymen."

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In a West Philadelphia church, families who lost their homes comfort each other.

At a news conference tonight he said firefighters made a "conscious decision" to allow the fire to burn so that the bunker would fall into the second floor or onto the street.

Joan Specter, a Republican who is a member of the City Council, called today for an independent investigation into the incident and its handling. The Mayor, a Democrat, said he would have an announcement along those lines later.

The purpose of an independent investigation, said Mrs. Specter, would be "not to place blame, but to ask questions." Among them would be: What was done in terms of planning for the Move situation? Did the police consult with anybody on the use of a bomb? Why did they not act a year ago, before the bunker was built?

'Hard to Comprehend'

Mrs. Specter summed up the feeling of many Philadelphians Monday night and today as one of shock. "It's so hard to comprehend," she said. "We all watched it on TV for a day and a half, and we're all coming down off that and trying to assess what happened."

Monday night, around the corner from the burning houses, a man spread his arms, palms downward, and asked his companion: "Is this madness?"

Up the street, three men from the neighborhood surveyed the flames in awe. "Whole damned block's gonna go up," one said, long before it actually did. "Watch Wilson get elected now."

Mrs. Specter said that this was not the time to talk about politics, but to focus on the homeless victims. But many others began talking right away of the effect of the incident on Mr. Goode's public esteem and on his ability to govern in the future.

One ally of the Mayor's said today that his administration had "failed catastrophically" in this situation and that it constituted an obvious setback for Mr. Goode.

He might retrieve the situation, said the Mayor's political ally, if he persuades people he did the best he could under the circumstances or that he was a victim of the unpredictable, or even

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Associated Press
Ramona Africa, a member of the radical group Move, in police van Monday after siege.

Associated Press

Associated Press

A woman confronting a plainclothes police officer yesterday near a house destroyed in fire in Philadelphia.

that he made an honest error of judgment. "But if a sizable number listen to his explanation and say it just doesn't wash," the ally said, "that would be bad."

Some Philadelphians worried about what the spectacle would do to the image of a city whose reputation as a dynamic, livable metropolis has lately been rising. "People nationally will never understand how it all happened," a television commentator said ruefully last night.

"It's an embarrassment to the city of

Philadelphia," said another resident. "It's the biggest thing to hit Philly since the Bicentennial," said a policeman with a wan smile.

Through it all, Mayor Goode has accepted responsibility and held himself accountable.

On his tour of the burned-out neighborhood today, he was applauded several times by the residents, many of whom seemed ambivalent about what has happened. On one hand, they wanted to get rid of Move, which they considered the bane of their lives. On the other, they now have no homes.