

“Every fire needs a little bit of help”

San Diego ELFs Burn Down Construction Site

anon.

2003

SAN DIEGO (August 1) A banner reading “You build it, we burn it. ELF” was found at the site of a blaze that destroyed the wooden frame of an upscale five-story apartment complex, prompting suspicions that the fire was part of an anti-urban sprawl initiative. The construction site is in northern San Diego, near the University of California in the so-called Golden Triangle, one of the region’s faster-growing areas. The project was being built by a corporation that is Southern California’s second largest apartment developer. The day after the fire, a small hand-printed sign taped to a nearby traffic barrier read: “Thank You, E.L.F. Burn Baby Burn.”

The ELF’s press office announced that they had not received a communiqué from a cell claiming responsibility for the action, but told a San Diego newspaper that the banner is “a legitimate claim of responsibility by the Earth Liberation Front.” In the last six years, decentralized and loosely-organized groups adhering to the ELF’s principles have used fires and other acts of sabotage to resist a variety of capitalist ecoterrorist industries, including SUV dealerships in Pennsylvania, ski resorts in Colorado, and developers of luxury homes on Long Island.

The San Diego blaze caused an estimated \$20 million in damage and thoroughly destroyed the 206-unit complex, the first of many buildings on the 34-acre site between a shopping mall and a highway which will include a total of 1,500 high-rent middle-class apartments. There were no injuries. Eyewitnesses said that flames shot nearly 100 feet in the air and burned with such intensity that it blew out glass panes and melted window shades in apartments blocks away. Fire crews were hampered by a lack of water—there was only one fire hydrant in the construction area and the site’s dirt roads that were impassable for the heavy fire trucks.

More than eighty governmental agencies, including the San Diego Fire Department’s Metro Arson Strike Team, the FBI and the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, are searching the ruins for any clues. Arson investigators said that, if the fire had been set intentionally, it had been done when the construction site was most flammable. A 41-year-old restaurant manager who lives in an apartment complex near the blaze remarked to one reporter that “at least someone somewhere is trying to point out that the over-development is clogging our already congested urban areas...This is a war to protect the environment, to raise the consciousness of people.” When approached for questioning by ATF agents at his home, he refused to talk to them.

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