

# Hubbub in Martinez Jail-- Nobody Knows Just Why

Prisoners at the Contra Costa County Jail in Martinez broke windows and set several small fires during an hour-long disturbance there last night.

No one was injured in the

fracas, and the inmates involved returned to their cells without being forced to and without issuing demands.

"We don't know what the cause is," said Undersheriff Harry Ramsay. He noted,

however, that prisoners had been complaining about overcrowding in the old jail — built to hold 160 men (but with beds for only 125), and now housing 210 prisoners (including women).

Ramsay said the disturbance began after dinner, about 6:30 p.m., in the day room on the first floor of the two-story jail where 80 prisoners were being fed in a room designed to hold 50.

About 14 inmates walked into a corridor and began smashing windows with broom handles. They demolished two toilets and a television set, Ramsay said, and burned some newspapers, magazines, blankets and mattresses.

Four Martinez fire engines and 14 firemen put out the small blazes.

Ramsay said he ordered in 30 or 40 deputies from the sheriff's office across the street when the trouble began. One officer was hit by a flying cup but was not injured.

Prisoners threw debris out the broken windows onto the lawn in front of the jail, a gray concrete building at the corner of Main and Pine streets on the edge of downtown Martinez.

Ramsay said the jail has been troubled by sporadic outbreaks among the prisoners.

He called last night's incident one of "these contagious problems that are striking prisons and county jails all over the country."

Earlier this year, Contra Costa county voters defeated a \$10 million bond issue for building a new jail.