

L.A. Jail Rebellion Folds in 4½ Hours

LOS ANGELES — (AP) — Angry inmates staged a 4½-hour rebellion in their 11th floor cell block at the downtown Hall of Justice yesterday, setting fires and breaking plumbing before unarmed sheriff's deputies took control.

"The inmates offered no resistance," said a sheriff's spokesman after 75 deputies, carrying no guns or batons but wearing protective gear, marched into the block and ordered the 60 to 70 men back to their cells.

Some were later transferred to allow repair of broken water pipes and light fixtures, smashed during the uprising.

No hostages were taken, and the prisoners had no weapons, deputies said.

The cell block houses 150 men, but authorities said many didn't join the protest — which was staged over the quality of prison food.

The jail division chief, Harold B. Cramer, said later he didn't think the problem was food but that the rebellion was inspired by "hostility and militancy" in prisons across the country.

"I don't eat as well for breakfast as they do," he said of the prisoners' diet.

The unruly outburst began at 7:15 a.m., just after breakfast.

Prisoners had been served apple nougats, hot cereal with cream and sugar, potatoes, creamed beef, bread and coffee.

Authorities said the men complained about the food and the lack of a central dining facility.

They refused to surrender their trays and began yelling, banging on the bars and setting fire to their mattresses and clothing.

As guards retreated from the caged-in walkway outside cells where prisoners were

gathered, the men began breaking light fixtures and toilets.

Deputies called in reinforcements and four fire companies as flames and smoke emerged from the barred windows of the gray stone building in the downtown civic center.

After the disturbance was quelled at 11:52 a.m., about half of the inmates on the 11th floor were moved to the ninth floor, deputies said, because of damage and flooding in their cells.

Broken glass and porcelain and charred bits of mattresses littered the cell block.

A prison doctor examined prisoners and said two had minor cuts.

Authorities said no punishment of the prisoners was expected.

About 1100 inmates, all of them awaiting sentencing or facing trial, are kept in the 13-story Hall of Justice.