

Food Executive Dies in N.Y. Plunge

By a Washington Post Staff Writer

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NEW YORK, Feb. 3—Eli M.

Black, board chairman and chief executive officer of the billion-dollar United Brands conglomerate, plunged to his death today from the 44th floor of the Pan American Building in what police said was an apparent suicide.

Officials of United Brands, parent firm of United Fruit Co., said Black, 53, had become severely depressed because 1974 was "an extremely

difficult year" financially for the company.

In the nine months ending last September, United Brands lost \$40 million, compared to a \$16 million profit for the same period the previous year. The company's sales in 1973 totaled \$2 billion.

Edward Gelsthorpe, executive vice president of the company, said Black had been under "great strain during the past several weeks because of business pressures." He said last year was difficult for the huge marketing and packing

firm because of an October hurricane in Central America that heavily damaged the Banana Division, and because of newly imposed banana taxes in Central American nations.

"The great tragedy . . . is that under his leadership the company was on its way to overcoming its several crises," Gelsthorpe said. "We were convinced that the traumatic period was behind us."

New York homicide detectives said Black, who lived in Westport, Conn., arrived at

the midtown Manhattan building at about 8 a.m. and locked himself in his office. He apparently broke a window with a heavy attache case before plunging to a road ramp that rings the building, police said.

Police said Black did not leave a suicide note.

Black was a member of the board of governors of the American Jewish Committee and former chairman of the publication committee of the magazine *Commentary*, which is published by the committee.