

# Victim could use kind, gentle act

So President Bush wants a kinder, gentler nation?

Then let our new president step forward to support the frail, 58-year-old grandmother who is still seeking redress for the severe beating baton-wielding policemen inflicted on her outside one of his campaign dinners.

Dolores Huerta — 5 feet 2 inches, 110 pounds — was among some 1,800 people who turned out for that fundraiser at a San Francisco hotel last September. They included 700 of the Republican faithful who came to dine on \$1,000-a-plate treats, 1,000 demonstrators and 100 helmeted police who were to keep the protesters as far from the diners as possible.

Huerta is first vice president of the United Farm Workers union and, as such, a leading advocate and practitioner of non-violence. She was passing out literature that denounced Bush for ridiculing her union's nationwide grape boycott when the police abruptly waded into the crowd of protesters in front of the hotel.

## Charging police

The police prodded with their 3-foot-long clubs — poking, jabbing, pushing very hard to move the crowd across the street. The demonstrators were jammed tightly against one another. They couldn't move off the sidewalk fast enough to satisfy the charging police. They couldn't escape the police batons.

Huerta was hit high in the back, then struck near her kidneys with a blow that took her breath away. She crumpled to the sidewalk in pain. Falling batons had broken two of her ribs and ruptured her spleen. Doctors had to remove it during her six-day stay in a local hospital.

Videotapes shown later to San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos and others disclosed that Huerta had been clobbered even though she was obeying police orders. The chief suspect is a 6-foot tall, 200-pound officer, Francis Achim.

As for Huerta, said Agnos, "We could see she was very cooperative. We could even read her lips saying, 'I'm moving!'"

The American Civil Liberties Union quickly demanded an investigation by the city's Office of Citizen Complaints, which monitors alleged police misconduct.

The agency concluded that Achim had used excessive and unnecessary force, but could take no action itself because it does not have prosecutorial powers.

## Why don't they spy?

The district attorney definitely could have done something. But he decided to refer the matter to the grand jury instead of conducting his own investigation, and the grand jury decided to do no more than recommend changes in police procedures.

## Hispanic Link

By Dick Meister

To the great and certainly justified anger of Huerta and her supporters in some three dozen labor, civil rights, political and gay rights groups, the grand jury actually suggested that similar incidents could be averted if the police would spy on groups such as unions that might be planning demonstrations. Officers would thus be prepared to move in swiftly and without major incident.

But even Police Chief Frank Jordan balked at that, acknowledging, in fact, that the need is to improve the Police Department's crowd-control procedures and presented the city's police commission with a plan that supposedly will do that. Yet the chief insisted that the officers were "using

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proper techniques" when they battered Huerta and that there was no reason to discipline anyone.

Both the police commission and Agnos have refused to challenge the police chief's judgment, and it seems obvious that no one in San Francisco with the power to do so is going to move to right the terrible wrong that was done to Huerta and the cause of free and open dissent.

The United Farm Workers union has filed a \$15 million claim against the city on Huerta's behalf — reasoning, as union attorney Diana Lyons says, that "without an indictment and with no serious action being taken to discipline the officer who nearly killed Dolores, a lawsuit is the only way we can tell them they were wrong."

That probably won't do it, either. But suppose Bush spoke up? That would be a truly kind and gentle act.

Dick Meister is co-author of "A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers."