

## A TEXAS-SIZE DELAY IN JUSTICE FOR FARM WORKERS

In 1966-67, the United Farm Workers conducted a strike in the Rio Grande Valley. Hundreds of farm workers joined the strike and supported the demand for a minimum wage of \$1.25 per hour. The growers refused to recognize the union so the farm workers marched 300 miles to Austin, the state capitol, where Governor John Connally declined to meet with them.

Instead of agreeing to negotiate with their workers, the growers called in the Texas Rangers, who brutally beat up dozens of farm workers. The UFW filed suit in federal court.

Five years later, a 3-judge federal panel found that the Rangers had acted illegally. The judges' decision reads:

*"(Magdaleno) Dimas was hospitalized from June 2 through June 6. He suffered a brain concussion, multiple bruises on both sides of the neck and other bruises behind his left ear, in his left side, on the right side of his back, on his left forearm and left wrist.....X-ray negatives revealed that Dimas had received a severe blow to the lower right portion of his back causing the spine to curve out of shape away from the impact point. Dimas also suffered a laceration which required four stitches to close.*

*"Rodriguez had cuts and bruises behind his right ear, bruises on his right elbow, on his right upper arm, on the right upper portion of his back and on his right jaw. His left little finger was broken and the nail was torn off."*

The Rangers and the growers had claimed that these two strikers had injured themselves while trying to avoid arrest. The judges responded, *"It is difficult indeed for this Court to visualize two grown men colliding with each other so as to cause such injuries."*

Eight years after the strike had begun, Justice William O. Douglas wrote for the Supreme Court:

*"They (United Farm Workers) sought to do no more than organize a lawful union to better the situation of one of the most economically oppressed classes of workers in the country. Because of the intimidation by state authorities, their lawful effort was crushed."*

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