

## RENE LOPEZ (1962-1983)

On September 21, 1983, Rene Lopez, a worker at Sikkema Dairy near Fresno, was shot to death at point blank range by company goons hired to harass the strikers who were attempting to bring in the UFW to represent them.

A few weeks earlier, Rene's co-workers had asked the 21-year-old native of Nuevo Leon, to be their spokesperson, since he was bilingual, having graduated from Carruthers High School in Fresno County. Rene, reported by his high school classmates as a gentle person who didn't get into fights, respectfully told the dairy owner that below-minimum wage for 60-hour workweeks was unacceptable and he requested a modest increase.

Fred Sikkema's cruel response was that he intended to fire some of the workers and force the remaining workers to do firees' job as well as their own...for the same pay. Dismayed, Rene and a committee approached the UFW to ask how to proceed. Roberto Escutia in the UFW's Horticulture Division was assigned to help.

He advised the workers to file for a union representation election, so that retaliation the company would take against them, for concerted activity, could be proven to be unfair labor practices for supporting the UFW.

Since the company threatened to fire some of the workers, they decided to strike while at the same time petitioning the ALRB to conduct an election for union representation.

Sikkema's response to the strike was to hire goons, including Dietmar Ahsmann, his brother-in-law, and Donato Estrada, a Mexican known to be involved with drugs.

On the day of the election, minutes after Rene had cast his ballot for the UFW, Ahsmann and Estrada drove by on their way to meet with Sikkema in one of the dairy buildings. Five minutes later they drove back in the car to where the strikers were gathered and they motioned to Rene to come over to the car.

Quietly Rene walked over to the passenger side of the car being driven by Ahsmann. When he was within three feet of the car, Estrada pulled a gun and shot Rene "a quema-ropa," at point blank range, in the face.

Estrada then began to aim his gun at the other strikers and one of those strikers told me he heard Rene's last words after being shot, "No los mates!" ("Don't kill them!") Even mortally wounded, Rene was still advocating for his fellow workers.

Ahsmann was acquitted for his part and Estrada was sentenced to 7 years in prison. The DA, however, refused to charge Fred Sikkema