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**DWAYNE E. WALLS**

## **Tobacco's Double Revolution**

**New York Panthers**

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grace; it is not compelled by law. In a case such as that of the Panthers, where much of the evidence will undoubtedly come from informers or infiltrators, very little is disclosed prior to trial. The defendants have not even been able to discover the nature of the evidence which led to the indictments; for, in the absence of certain defined factors, the minutes of the grand jury need not be made available to the defense. Of course, the routine inadequacy of pretrial discovery techniques in the criminal law is compounded where access to the defendants themselves is difficult.

Much has been omitted from this account: the petty, persistent denial of privileges to the prisoners by the Department of Corrections; the more serious failures for several months to treat the epileptic condition of one prisoner; the reindictment of all the defendants upon the same charges, combined with a series of illegal possession of weapons charges. For each matter recourse to court action has been

necessary. The epilepsy was not treated until a court ordered the prisoner transferred to a hospital; a prisoner could not see his wife until the court so ordered. An overwhelming burden is added to the usual problems of defending an unpopular client when conditions of imprisonment and the problems of bail must also be litigated.

What has happened to fifteen Black Panthers could have happened to many other accused men in our impersonal system of justice. Others have suffered and will suffer as long in jail without trial, without privileges, with inadequate preparation for trial. For most of these "others" there will be no outcry. Yet, in none of the other cases will the unjust result be reached as it was reached here: as a deliberate matter of prosecution policy ratified in every material respect by the courts of New York State. It is this aspect of the Panther case that is most disturbing—most political. It is the aspect, also, that raises grave questions as to the motives in the original prosecution and the likelihood of a fair trial. □

## TOBACCO'S DOUBLE REVOLUTION

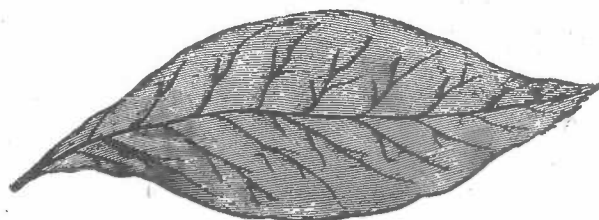
### DWAYNE E. WALLS

*Mr. Walls is a staff writer on The Charlotte Observer, now on leave to write a book on rural-to-urban migration.*

The plant beds are lying idle now—little plastic bandages covering countless scratches in the dark, sandy soil of the Southeastern Coastal Plains. Through the winter nobody pays much attention to them except the Florida-bound tourists, to whom the beds and the strange-looking curing barns that dot the countryside are curiosities. Some time between mid-January and early March, depending on the location and the weather, the plant beds will be seeded and the plastic covering will be replaced by cheesecloth.

In early spring the shoots will be plucked gently from the plant beds and transplanted, carefully, symmetrically—42 inches between rows, 22 inches between plants—into the rich black loam of the region. By early summer, when the leaves begin to ripen, the rows of Bright Leaf tobacco will cover close to 600,000 acres of land from southside Virginia to northern Florida and into a tip of Alabama. Another 200,000 or so acres of Burley tobacco will stand ripening in the hills and bottom lands of Kentucky, Tennessee and the western portions of North Carolina and Virginia.

Altogether, more than half a million farm families in eight states will look to the 1970 tobacco crop as their major source—and in many cases only source—of income. But even now, before the seed is scattered down the plant beds, thousands of these



tobacco farmers know that the 1970 crop will be their last. Thousands more wonder how much longer they will be able to hang on, to squeeze a meager living out of their annual crop.

Tobacco, agriculture's last great stronghold of hand labor, is in the early stage of a double revolution which might improve the nation's health and shore up its free enterprise, but which almost certainly will uproot the lives of several hundred thousand farm families who depend on tobacco for a living. These are the small landowners, the tenants and the sharecroppers who cannot possibly survive the changes. Already tens of thousands of them have been driven off the land, and they are only a fraction of those destined ultimately to lose or to change their livelihood.

In North Carolina alone, according to Dr. E. Walton Jones of the Coastal Plains Regional Commission, an estimated 100,000 farm families will be surplus labor by 1975. These families, it should be noted, are mostly Negro and most of them live now in the tobacco-growing eastern portion of the state.

What is this double revolution in tobacco? Anyone who has watched television lately should be familiar

with a small part of it. The health hazard in tobacco is amply advertised and no doubt accounts for the slight but steady decline in cigarette manufacture and consumption that began several years ago. It seems only a matter of time before the present voluntary ban on tobacco advertising, imposed piecemeal by some newspapers and radio and television stations, becomes mandatory for broadcasters. Worse yet, as the farmers see it, Congress' almost annual threat to drop the tobacco support program seems to pick up additional converts with each session.

But the greater part of the revolution in tobacco, the cause for most concern among the small landowners and the landless husbandmen, is sponsored not by the government and not by public or private health agencies but by the tobacco industry itself. The traditional, almost ritualistic methods by which tobacco has been grown, harvested and marketed can no longer prevail against recent technical and scientific developments. What science and technology did to the cotton fields of the Deep South and to the coal fields of the Southern Appalachians they are doing now to the tobacco fields of the Coastal Plains.

The most recent development was announced in mid-November by R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., the nation's largest manufacturer of tobacco products. The company has devised a process which expands the shredded leaf, increasing the volume of a given weight of tobacco 40 per cent to 50 per cent. Whatever its impact on the health factor in smoking, a point that is as yet unclear, the development of puffed tobacco seems to imply that the company eventually will need 40 per cent to 50 per cent less tonnage than it buys now.

A Reynolds spokesman has said that "tests conducted to date indicate that puffed tobacco would account for a relatively small percentage of the total tobacco blends used in Reynolds brands." But *The Wall Street Journal* seemed sure of its facts when it reported that Reynolds plans to switch to exclusive use of puffed tobacco in its cigarettes over the next two to three years. Other tobacco manufacturers and researchers at North Carolina State University in Raleigh are working on a freeze-drying process which would achieve the same 40 to 50 per cent increase in the tobacco's bulk.

Research, sponsored largely by tobacco manufacturers, has also developed cigarettes that look, taste and smell like the real thing but which contain not a shred of tobacco. Apparently the domestic manufacturers have no present plans to market the non-tobacco cigarettes because of problems with the shelf life of the product and lack of data on what effect the substitute material (cellulose in most of the experimental cigarettes) might have on the smoker's lungs. But part-tobacco cigarettes, identified as containing a substantial quantity of non-tobacco ingredients, are sold regu-

larly in the United States by foreign manufacturers.

Any one of these developments would be enough to create a tremor throughout the tobacco economy of the rural Coastal Plains. Together they have cast a pall over a region already troubled by problems of oversupply, labor shortage, rising costs and the beginning of a technological revolution in planting and harvesting.

Tobacco has always been a demanding crop, requiring large amounts of hand labor and some skill in its growing and curing. As one chronicler said of it more than half a century ago: "No sick child demands more constant and careful watching than a barn of the golden leaf when it is being cured by the flue process."

From its modest beginning as a \$10,950 crop out of Jamestown in 1618, tobacco rose to become the coin of the realm throughout Virginia and the Carolinas, justifying its title as the Golden Token. Vast fortunes were built on it. Merchants and even clergymen were paid in tobacco. And, significant to the region's later economic and political values, it created a class of small yeoman farmers—men whose tiny patch of tobacco gave them an essential freedom, if not the wealth, of the Virginia aristocrats and the Delta cotton planters. Even today the average tobacco allotment in North Carolina, the heartland of flue-cured leaf, is only about 3 acres.

Although the farmer may own considerably more acreage, he can, under the support program, plant only what he is allotted. He may buy or rent additional allotments from his neighbors, but he cannot transfer such allotments across county lines. Thus it is extremely difficult for the small farmer to enlarge his operation sufficiently to justify mechanization and equally difficult to operate at a profit without mechanization.

The old system survived because it had available the strong backs of hundreds of thousands of laborers—poor whites as well as Negroes—who were offered little more than bare survival in the near-feudal system. The relatively few big planters relied on tenants and sharecroppers to produce the crop. Small landowners and frequently tenants themselves have depended heavily on impoverished blacks, paid modest wages during the brief harvesting season but given little more than free housing the rest of the year.

This layered society has been shaken in recent years as blacks and poor whites moved out of the tobacco fields in increasing numbers. Some of them have been replaced by ever more advanced machinery rumbling into the fields. Others simply have left a labor vacuum.

Despite the difficulty of putting together large tobacco operations, the trend is in that direction. Mechanical harvesters already are operating on a few large farms. Once the demand for such machinery is sufficient to justify commercial production, the harvesters will sweep the small

landowner and the tenant right out of farming. It requires no great imagination to foresee the day, maybe five years hence, when a relatively few large, corporate farms will grow all of the flue-cured tobacco the market demands.

Further, the corporate farms might grow it on contract to the manufacturers, largely without benefit of the present intricate system of marketing, warehousing and processing that supports much of the present tobacco economy.

For a great many tobacco farmers it does not really matter whether the upheaval comes in a single season or gradually over five seasons or a decade. The Negro tenants and sharecroppers have little hope of surviving on the land, no matter how gradually the revolution progresses. Thousands of them are leaving the tobacco fields every year, unable to survive on the tenant's share of a 5-acre patch or less. Their departure for the urban centers of the Northeast has created a labor shortage affecting larger tenants and small landowners, speeding up mechanization and thus creating more pressure on the marginal operators to get out or get bigger. Some larger farmers have resorted only recently to importing migratory labor. The state's first tobacco



labor camp was built last year by a group of Wake County growers.

The prospects are little better for the small landowners, those who hold a 3-to-5-acre allotment. Some of them are selling out as tobacco farmers—sometimes to take industrial jobs that are beginning to open up in the region, but more often to remain on the land as truck farmers or chicken farmers. Still, diversification is slow to take hold because of tradition and the fear of breaking loose from a total dependence on the traditional crop. As one of the region's economists said not long ago: "Tobacco has been a damn good-looking woman to these farmers and they will stick with her to the end."

Each tobacco allotment carries with it a corresponding quota stipulating the maximum number of pounds of leaf that can be marketed. The poundage quota might range anywhere from 1,200 per acre to 2,000. Until two years ago, many farmers found that they could rent their allotments and clear almost as much profit as they could by farming the acreage themselves. The rental market has dropped sharply since 1967 because the high cost of production has cut down the price a farmer can expect in rental. In 1968, the latest year for which figures are available, 72,000 acres of tobacco were rented in North Carolina at an average price of about 14c per pound on an average quota of 1,800 pounds—or a return of about \$250 per acre to the owner of the allotment.

The average rental price in 1967 was about 18c per pound. In 1969 it probably was about 12c, and the indications are that the price will fall to 10c for the 1970 crop. Increasingly, allotment owners by the thousands are learning that their allotments or portions of them are nearly worthless.

Again using the figures from North Carolina as a standard, it is probable that close to 10 per cent of the nation's allotment of flue-cured tobacco acreage will not be planted or harvested in 1970. North Carolina's unused allotment has increased steadily from 25,000 acres in 1967 to 30,000 acres in 1968 and 35,000 acres out of a state allotment of 416,000 acres in 1969.

As they always have to some extent, small landowners can continue to make a crop only by cooperating with one another—swapping and sharing their labor, their equipment and their land. One man who has a good allotment but poor land might enter into a loose arrangement with his neighbor who has only a fractional allotment but the soil to produce the kind of tobacco that will bring higher prices on the market. A man who has unusually good soil or the skill and the time to produce plant beds may do nothing but supply his neighbors with plants and take a portion of their ripe tobacco as payment.

One measure of the small grower's plight is that he has begun to drop his fierce independence and mistrust of any judgment but his own. The militant National Farmers Organization began organizing in the Southeast last spring and currently has local chapters in more than half of North Carolina's 100 counties, plus several counties in the other tobacco states. Its greatest success so far has been with the hog and grain farmers, but small tobacco farmers also are beginning to join and even more are likely to sign within the next year. NFO organizers have said their main effort in the region in 1970 will be in the tobacco fields, among the small farmers.

In North Carolina, which has more individual farms than any other state except Texas, 42,000 small farms went under between 1959 and 1964. It is doubtful that even NFO tactics can do more than slow the attrition. □