

Black Panther Acquitted Of Kidnap-Murder Charge

Wyche free; relives year spent in jail

• Terror

By AL RUTLEDGE

BALTIMORE

"The most tragic thing of all," Charles Wyche said settling down on a sofa in the office of his attorney, Larry Gibson, "is the way they treat the men in the jail who haven't even been convicted of a criminal offense."

Mr. Wyche, a Black Panther, had just been acquitted of kidnap-murder charges by a 12-member jury. He had spent almost 12 months in City Jail with the death of Eugene Leroy Anderson.

Ironically, he was more concerned with the plight of fellow inmates than with his own near-tragic fate.

A jury of seven women and five men had spent five days listening to testimony which included statements made by Arnold Loney and Hannibal Kebe, both of whom accused Mr. Wyche of not only conspiring to murder Anderson but of actually having pulled the trigger.

"We weren't really friends," Wyche said of the State's star witnesses. "We worked together in the Party and I was surprised when they did what they did."

There was no trace of bitterness in the voice of this 30-year-old father who had lost job, credit standing, automobile and a year of his life.

"In fact," he said, when questioned about the trial, testimony and his personal hardship, "I don't want to talk about that, really, it happened, it's over for me but not for those brothers still locked up in that dungeon."

For those brothers still locked up in that dungeon, Charles Wyche charges "they are subjected to the most brutalizing conditions."

He told of how he first entered the institution:

"They immediately put me on L-Section. I hadn't broken a rule. I hadn't been tried and proven guilty of any crime and I was immediately locked up under maximum security conditions in the punishment area."

Such treatment "is the fate, of all members of the Black Panther Party" he declared.

During his stay in the jail, Charles Wyche swears that except for 10-minute periods three times weekly he was locked in his cell 24 hours a day.

"We got no exercise, no yard time and weren't allowed to walk to the commissary. I defy anyone to live in that jail 24 hours," he stated sternly. "If all that wasn't enough, the food they serve the men in there is horrible and the medical attention is worse," he concluded.

Men on L-Section are kept in cells individually so that they see only guards and walls. They are not allowed magazines or books and "the rats are so plentiful the men tried to work out a treaty with them so that they can live their lives and we live ours," Wyche revealed.

"Mail comes in," he continued "but sometimes they let it pile up for six or seven weeks before you get it then it may have sections cut out or blotted out so you can't read it."

City Jail and the ordeal of the trial are both behind Charles Wyche now but his friend and former supervisor, at the Self Help Project, Jehonadah Jehu Whittle, is the first to declare that "that ain't all."

"They owe the man something if it's nothing but an apology. They snatched him up for a whole year and now they tell him to go on back home and do the best you can," he said, nearly shouting.

Mr. Whittle was one of the chief defense witnesses in Mr. Wyche's trial. He produced work records showing that Mr. Wyche was at work on the day the state contended he was with the persons planning to kill Eugene Anderson.

"I can understand the State's Attorney's office trying to win a case," Mr.

Whittle stated as our interview came to an end, "but what they did was overlook evidence favorable to the defendant."

"That meant they only got one side of the story and it made them look like fools when they tried to put that stuff over on thinking people."

What Charles Wyche is going to do from here on is questionable. I'm out of a job, I have a family and I don't even know how I'm going to feed them," he admitted, "I don't know where I'm going from here."