

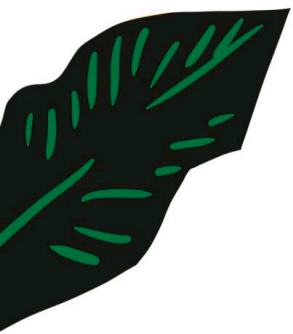
Standing up for your rights

A farmworker's story



**How does the blurred line
between big business and
state politics affect you as a
migrant farm worker?
And how can you protect
yourself?**

This is a story about a big tobacco
company, a powerful farmer and a
migrant worker.



This is Carlos's* story.



Where I live in Mexico, it's a small town and there are almost no jobs.

I have to go elsewhere to look for work.

*Name has been changed


Every year, Carlos comes to the US to work on farms in North Carolina on a H-2A worker visa.



"I come for my children, I want to give them a better life."

I want them to continue studying because I don't want them to come here to suffer like me.





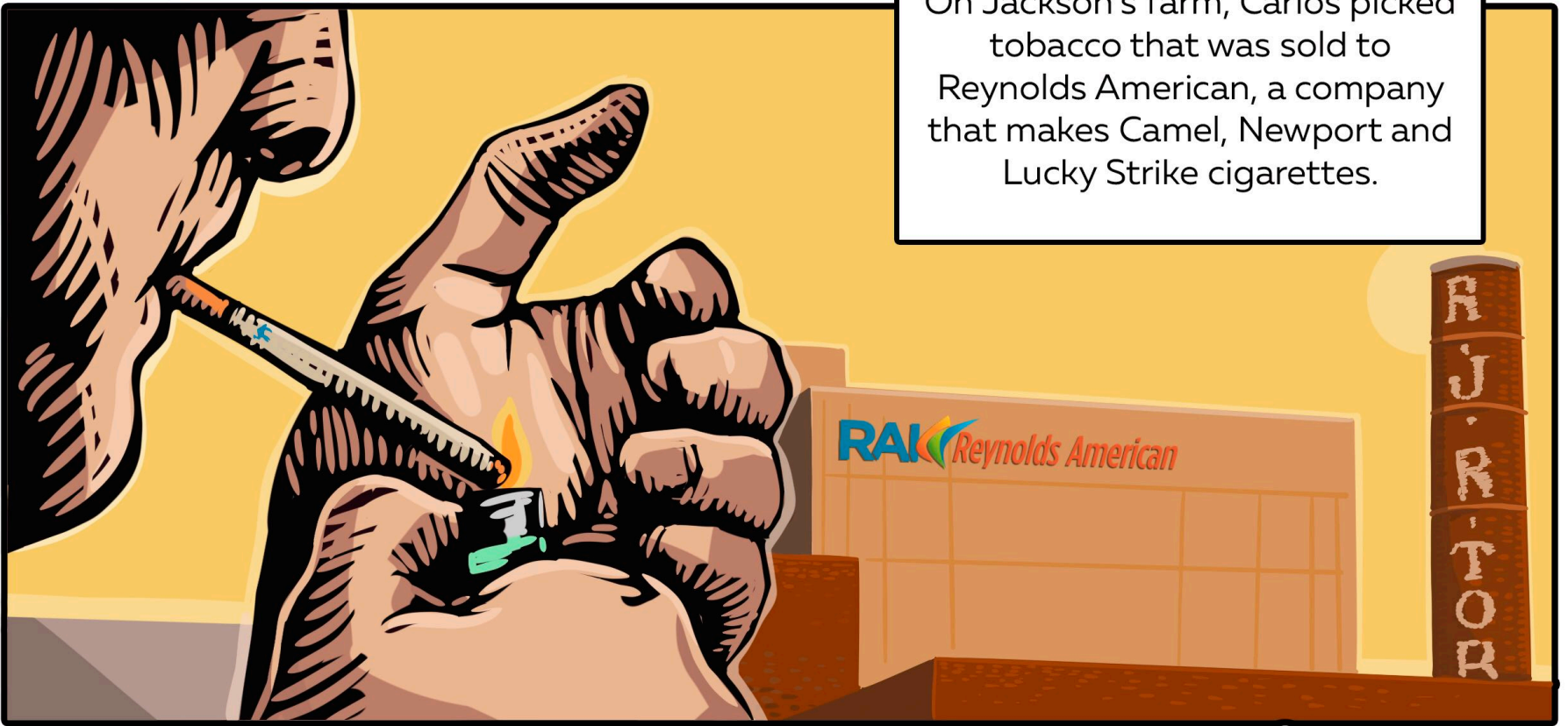
I have been working with the same employer for some years now. We cut tomatoes and tobacco.

Tobacco cutting is very hard. They say that it's 95°F, but I feel that we are at 100°F or 110°F. It's boiling hot.



"I used to work for Jackson Farming Company."

On Jackson's farm, Carlos picked tobacco that was sold to Reynolds American, a company that makes Camel, Newport and Lucky Strike cigarettes.



Reynolds American sets standards for its suppliers. It says that companies like Jackson Farming Company should make sure workers like Carlos have a safe place to live and work.

But that's not how Carlos remembers Jackson's farm.



"They were very hard on the people."

There were problems with the housing too.



"Where I lived, we called it a chicken coop because it was just wooden walls and a tin roof. In November, it would rain and all the water would leak in."

Carlos was paid by the hour. According to his contract, this should have included time spent travelling between fields. But this isn't what happened.



"They said that the time we used to move should not be counted."



"It was about three hours a week."

This was wage theft. It wasn't fair. Or legal.

**Such treatment is not unusual.
One report found North
Carolina to be the worst state
to work in in the US.**

Farm workers don't have the same protections as other workers. This makes it hard for people like Carlos to receive fair treatment.



At the farm, Carlos met people from a union.



"They asked us about how we are treated at work, how we are paid and if we are doing well."

Carlos and some fellow workers complained about wage theft. They got help from the union and a lawyer to begin legal proceedings against Jackson Farming Company.

Carlos was nervous.



"I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't want to get in trouble."

Some of Carlos's fears came true, when he lost his job.



"They retaliated against us and fired us the following year."

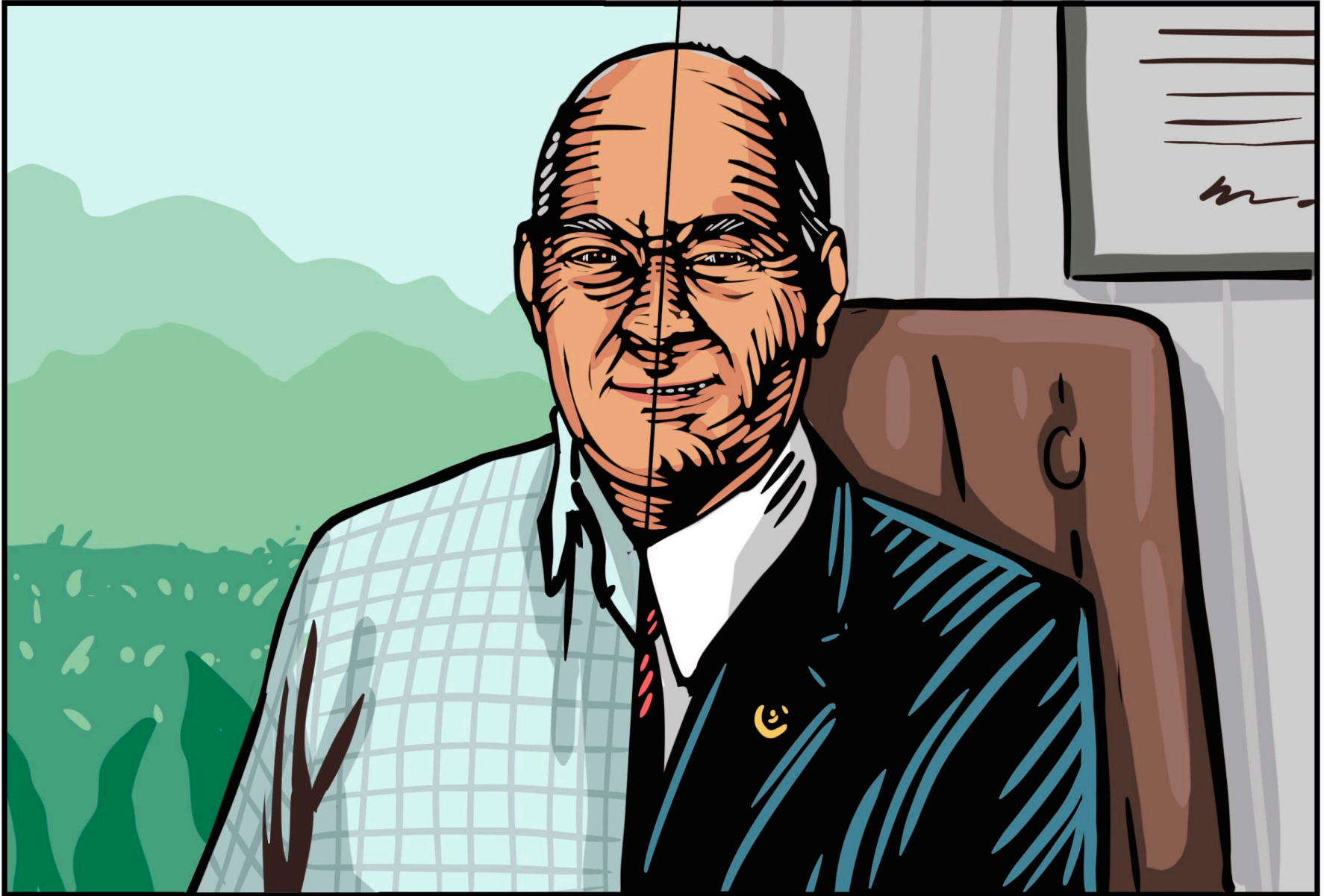
Even though they'd already been fired, Carlos and his fellow workers hoped they could make conditions better for other workers on the farm.



They asked for a written agreement that would allow the union to negotiate with the farm on behalf of workers. In return, they offered not to take the farm to court.

But the farm's owner, Brent Jackson, rejected this suggestion.

As well as being a big land owner, Brent Jackson is a well-connected politician. He later used his power to make the sort of agreement that Carlos's lawyers were proposing illegal.



This is just one example of Jackson trying to limit workers' rights.

His political campaigns have been funded by a company that buys his tobacco, Reynolds American, despite the company's claims that suppliers should allow workers to unionise.

Despite everything, Carlos persevered. Eventually, he was awarded thousands of dollars in back wages.



"It was the first time that I demanded something, our rights as worker. I felt good because this is our work and we won."

The union helped Carlos get a job on another farm, with regular breaks, fair pay and good housing.

There are a lot of people who think you are untouchable and try to underestimate you, but that's not right.

He is proud he stood up for his rights.

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