

Sirhan Defense Rests, Admits Account of Slaying Is 'Absurd'

Jury Hears for First Time Transcript of Chamber Session
in Which Defendant Accused Judge of 'Railroading' Him

BY DAVE SMITH

Times Staff Writer

The defense for Sirhan Bishara Sirhan rested its case Thursday, hanging its hopes on an admittedly "absurd" story of how the Palestinian Arab came to kill Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

After testimony from 29 witnesses, including seven psychologists and psychiatrists, defense attorney Grant B. Cooper read, for the first time in the jury's hearing, the transcript of a Feb. 25 chamber session in which Sirhan accused Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker of "railroading" him into the gas chamber. Having underscored that blowup, Cooper cleared the way for the prosecution to begin rebuttal testimony today.

Dep. Dist. Attys. John E. Howard and David N. Fitts sought unsuccessfully to open rebuttal with a 12-minute color film of Kennedy's ebullient victory speech the night of last June 4, minutes before he was fatally shot.

Defense Strenuously Objects

Howard argued that the film would show that Kennedy's speech contained nothing that could be construed as a "triggering mechanism" for the dissociative emotional state in which the defense claims Sirhan killed Kennedy.

After strenuous objection from Cooper that the film was immaterial, Judge Walker concurred, on two grounds: (1) that no one ever claimed Kennedy had said anything that night that precipitated Sirhan's alleged trance or even claimed that Sirhan had actually heard the speech, and (2) a film of the happy, victorious senator could have an inflammatory effect on the jury outweighing the film's possible value.

Psychiatrist Bernard L. Diamond conceded that Sirhan's story of killing Kennedy "raises the gravest problems of credibility" and reads "like a script that would never be acceptable in a Class B motion picture."

But, Diamond made it clear, he believes it.

Diamond, in brief redirect examination by defense attorney Emile Zola Berman, admitted he had termed his psychiatric findings on Sirhan as "an absurd and preposterous story, unlikely and incredible."

"In my opinion," Diamond said, "this is the ultimate absurdity—too illogical even for the theater of the absurd."

Diamond said that when he entered the Sirhan case, he had no idea he would find evidence of "voodoo thinking" or "mail-order mysticism" and self-hypnosis involved in the slaying of a U.S. presidential candidate.

Affect Destiny of World

The absurdity, he said, was that such superstitious elements could, through the killing of Sen. Kennedy, "affect the destiny of this country and the entire world."

As Diamond concluded this statement, Howard asked, "Did you just read something?"

"Yes," said Diamond.

"When did you write it?"

"Late last night," Diamond said, "about midnight."

The prosecution has clearly shown, without expressing it verbally, its disaffection for Diamond's vivid, eloquently worded expressions on Sirhan's mental illness, which Diamond has read in court from prepared statements.

Shortly after Diamond, a full professor of law, criminology and psychiatry at UC Berkeley, was excused from the stand, it was read into the record that he served as the star defense psychiatric witness without fee.

USC psychology Prof. Georgene Seward was then called by the defense to testify on her evaluation of two batteries of psychological tests administered by two previous defense witnesses, clinical psycholo-

Please Turn to Page 24, Col. 3

Continued from Third Page

gists Martin M. Schorr and O. Roderick Richardson.

Dr. Seward said she agreed with both Schorr and Richardson that five different tests combined to portray Sirhan as a paranoid schizophrenic.

At one point Dr. Seward said Sirhan's reaction to one test indicated the possibility of "latent homosexual tendencies."

At that, Sirhan glared at the doctor, leaned over to defense attorney Russell Parsons and snapped, "What kind of a son of bitch do they think I am?"

Howard, cross-examining Dr. Seward, attempted to draw from her, as the prosecution has doggedly tried to do with six previous psychiatric experts, admissions that Sirhan's responses to the tests

could be construed as normal for a person in his circumstances, rather than psychotic.

But, as with the prior witnesses, Dr. Seward would concede that one question or another might be open to different interpretations, but that the main direction of all the tests, taken together, pointed to "a clear case of schizophrenic reaction, paranoid type."

At one point she said that "any good clinician" would never diagnose mental illness on the basis of only one question or even one test, but on the total picture.

Howard chuckled and said, "Yes, but a poor lawyer has to go through these tests one at a time."

Dr. Seward admitted that three of the tests

administered to Sirhan have been criticized within the profession, but she defended their use. One test, the Bender-Gestalt, was designed only to indicate organic brain damage, and since Sirhan was found to have none, its results were not that significant to the issues in the trial, she said.

Another test, the well-known Rorschach, or "inkblot" test, is not properly described as a "test," she testified, but as a diagnostic method of laying bare a subject's subconscious way of thinking and perceiving the world.

She said criticism of the Rorschach test has come largely from people who expect it to give quantitative answers which they can break down into evenly divided percentage categories. She said the critics have also complained that it offers no standard of

comparison for one subject to another, but added that that was not the Rorschach test's purpose.

The final defense witness was psychologist and cultural anthropologist George DeVos of UC Berkeley, who testified that he also examined Schorr's and Richardson's tests and arrived at the same diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia without knowing they had, too.

Like Dr. Seward, Dr. DeVos admitted that the

Rorschach test has been the subject of some criticism, but said he didn't doubt its validity and ad-

ded that he had never seen a case of anyone successfully faking interpretations of the inkblots.