

# Sirhan's Fate May Not Be Decided for Years

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Death Sentence Would Automatically Be Appealed Under Laws of California

Whatever penalty the jury decides for Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, it could be months or even years before his future is really certain.

On Monday, the seven-man, five-woman jury will begin deliberating whether he should be sentenced to death in San Quentin's gas chamber or to life imprisonment.

If they decree death, Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker could, on his own authority, commute the sentence to life imprisonment.

Barring that, appeal of a death sentence is automatic anyway, under California law.

Defense attorney Grant B. Cooper estimated Thursday, after the verdict of guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Robert F. Kennedy, that it would be at least one year before Sirhan's appeal—if there is one—would be resolved.

He said he planned to file a notice of appeal on

the verdict, but indicated he did not know whether he would press an appeal immediately.

"Partly," he added, "it depends on whether someone comes up with some money to conduct a defense." Cooper has defended Sirhan thus far without fee.

As to Sirhan's more immediate movements, it has been estimated by both defense and prosecution that the penalty phase starting Monday morning could wind up that same afternoon, or Tuesday at the latest.

Dep. Dist. Atty. John E. Howard says he will sum up the prosecution argument "in 20 minutes." Cooper, arguing for the defense, says he will be "extremely brief." Neither side plans to call witnesses.

Formal sentencing by Judge Walker was expected to be held about three weeks after the jury returns a verdict in the penalty phase.