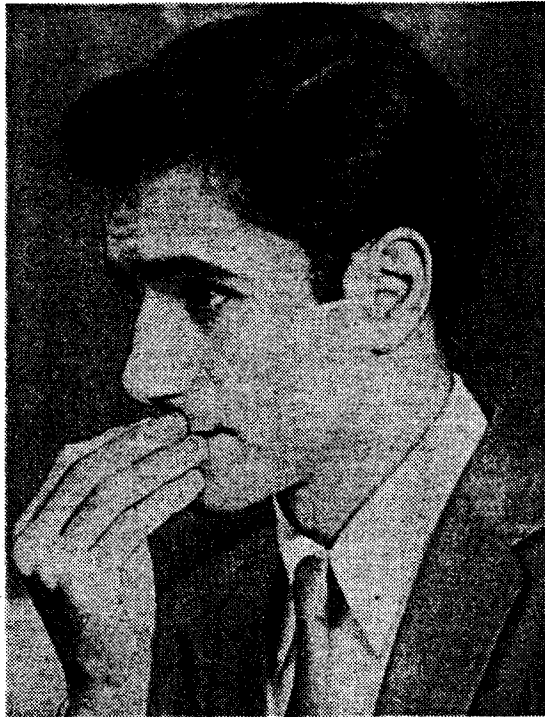


Jurors Decree Death for Sirhan In RFK Slaying



SIRHAN BISHARA SIRHAN
... "Even Jesus Christ couldn't have saved me."

Judge Delays Sentencing Pending Plea

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, April 23
—For the murder of one "Robert Francis Kennedy, a human being," a haggard jury decreed today that Sirhan Bishara Sirhan should die in the gas chamber at San Quentin State Prison.

The paranoid assassin, who shot Kennedy down at the high point on his quest for the presidency, took the verdict calmly.

"Even Jesus Christ couldn't have saved me," Sirhan told his lawyers. However, the death verdict can still be reduced to life imprisonment at the Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker. The judge put off sentencing until the 25-year-old Jordanian immigrant's lawyers submit a motion for a new trial. A hearing was set for May 14.

The jurors signaled a waiting courtroom full of guards, lawyers and newsmen at 11:04 a.m. after more than 11½ hours of deliberations over three days.

A buzzer from the jury room rasped twice and then, after a hesitant pause, a third time, the code for a verdict.

A sheriff's deputy hurried upstairs to Sirhan's windowless cell on the Hall of Justice's 13th floor and told a guard, Frederick Davis, to alert him.

Clad in T-shirt and under-

shorts, Sirhan was staring into a polished steel mirror, combed his hair.

Davis told him a verdict was coming. He said, "Okay," put on a pair of black slacks and blue shirt, and was led downstairs. According to one of his lawyers who saw him earlier, Sirhan had been expecting the death penalty.

Sirhan showed no sign of it as he entered the antiquated courtroom, chewing gum. Grinning jauntily, he took his seat and began chatting with defense counsel Russell Parsons.

Head bowed, chief defense counsel Grant B. Cooper waited with a disconsolate look on his face.

"The weak ones crumbled—just like the first time," he said of the jurors who convicted Sirhan of first-degree murder last week.

Judge Walker settled himself at the bench, put a microphone around his neck and called the jurors in at 11:34 a.m. They filed to their seats with tired, solemn expressions.

Jury Foreman Bruce D. Elliott, a 29-year-old systems analyst with a Ph.D. in engineering, stood up and turned in the verdict on a slip of paper. Judge Walker's Japanese-American clerk read it aloud, the conclusion of Case A-233-421:

See SIRHAN, A4, Col. 4



United Press International

Adel Sirhan, right, the only member of the Sirhan family present when the pen-

alty decision was announced confers with defense attorney Russell E. Parsons.

Sirhan Jury Decrees Death Penalty

SIRHAN, From A1

"We, the jury in the above-entitled action, having found the defendant, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, guilty of murder in the first degree as charged in the Count One of the indictment, now fix the penalty at death."

The verdict came against a backdrop of psychiatric testimony that Sirhan was mentally ill. But the verdict was one that American juries have unfailingly exacted for assassinations involving other deaths of major politicians—from President James Garfield to Harry S. Truman.

Newsmen rushed to waiting phones outside, their shouts of "death . . . death . . . death" bouncing back into the courtroom as Mrs. Nishikawa began polling each of the seven men and five women on the jury. Sirhan sat still, looking almost indifferent, still chewing his gum.

One by one, the jurors voiced their approval, some loudly, some softly. One, Ruth A. Stillman, clasped her hand to her face.

"It's unanimous," the judge said, "record the verdict."

Mrs. Nishikawa lifted a heavy rubber stamp and brought it down with a loud thump. It had required only six minutes out of a trial that had taken up 66 days in courtroom sessions since Jan. 7.

Sirhan, who once testified that he was "willing to die" for the Arab cause, was promptly led to the "holding tank" adjacent to the armored courtroom. He nodded reassuringly at Parsons as he left.

The defense lawyers had

dled with him three minutes later. Cooper and defense investigator Michael McCowan came out with tears in their eyes.

"I told him we had done the very best we could," Cooper said at the press conference. "He said, 'don't be concerned. Even Jesus Christ couldn't have saved me.'"

Sirhan's brother, Adel, 30, was the only member of the family in the courtroom. Shaken by the prospect of the death penalty for her son, his 56-year-old mother, Mary, secluded herself at her home in Pasadena.

"I tried to call her, but I couldn't get through," Adel Sirhan said unhappily. "The phone was busy." Chief prosecutor Lynn D.

Compton said it was impossible to tell whether Sirhan would ever actually be executed in light of the growing trend away from the death penalty in California and elsewhere.

"I wouldn't look for it in the near future; let's put it that way," he said. No one has been sent to the gas chamber at San Quentin since April 12, 1967, when Aaron Mitchell of Sacramento was put to death for killing a policeman.

Despite this, Compton said he felt "a great majority of the American public favors some of the psychiatric claims draw from the case. He has been serving without fee and they do, then I think this is arguing simply for a second-degree murder verdict, claim-

ing that Sirhan was at least, cover expenses. Deputy District Attorney

David N. Fitts, the Stanford-educated lawyer who handed most of the courtroom work for the prosecution, said he felt Sirhan's defense faltered and perhaps fell apart because of the psychiatric testimony.

"I hope it would be less suspect in future cases," he said. Asked where he thought it suspect, Fitts shot back: "You heard it."

Defense psychologists and psychiatrists claimed that Sirhan shot Kennedy in a hypnotic trance, "knowing next to nothing of what he was doing."

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