

Sirhan Found Guilty

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Jury Verdict Is Murder in First Degree

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LOS ANGELES, April 17 — Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was convicted of first-degree murder today for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

The penalty—either life imprisonment or death at San Quentin—will be fixed at a separate trial starting Monday.

For its part, the prosecution has already said, though not to the jurors, that it does not intend to push for the death penalty. In the closing of the prosecution case, Chief Deputy District Attorney Lynn D. (Buck) Compton called for first-degree murder conviction. But he had made clear to newsmen that the state would be satisfied if the conviction resulted in a sentence of straight life imprisonment.

If it does, Sirhan would also be eligible for parole, technically after seven years. (Life-termers released in California in 1967 served an average of 10.6 years.) But Sirhan would probably be kept in longer if indeed, he should ever be released.

Sirhan's jurors stepped down a shabby flight of steps to deliver their verdict at 11:12 a.m. PST (2:12 p.m. EST) after close to 17 hours of deliberations.

Eyes downcast, they took their seats, staring vacantly around the hastily clad defendant who had been lounging in his jail cell in his underwear.

Sirhan grimmed broadly. A minute later, Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker stepped up to the bench.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have a verdict?" he asked.

"We have, your honor," Jury



Associated Press

Grant B. Cooper, Sirhan chief defense counsel, stands amid court attaches while

three prosecuting attorneys conduct news conference shortly after jury's verdict.

Foreman Bruce D. Elliott replied, turning over a thin sheaf of papers. His face was white; his voice, dry and reedy.

Judge Walker scanned the six sheets, then handed them to his clerk, Alice Nishikawa. She read them aloud, the climax of a marathon 15-week trial:

We, the jury in the above-entitled action, find the defendant, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, guilty of murder in violation of Section 187, penal code, a felony, as charged in count one of the indictment . . . We further find it to be murder in the first degree."

Sirhan's face was serious by now, lips tight, shoulders tensed. He made no sound.

See SIRHAN, A8, Col. 1



SIRHAN B. SIRHAN
... hearing Monday

Mrs. Nishikawa peered through her white-rimmed glasses at the jurors. "Is this your verdict?" she asked them in a stern, clear voice. "So say you all?"

The seven men and five women, from plumber to Ph.D., answered yes in a disjointed chorus. Juror George A. Stitzel, a Los Angeles Times press room supervisor, nodded up and down with a pained frown.

Clear Victory

It was a clear victory for the prosecution, a sharp rejection of the public psychoanalysis the defense had produced on the paranoid immigrant's behalf.

Sirhan's top defense lawyer, Grant B. Cooper, asked that the jurors be polled individually, but the result was the same.

The rest was anticlimax: Guilty verdicts on five counts

of assault with intent to commit murder for Sirhan's shooting spree last June 5 at the Ambassador Hotel when he fatally shot Kennedy and wounded five others.

Judge Walker quickly set the penalty trial for 9:30 a.m. Monday after a whispered bench conference where he denied Cooper's bid for a fresh set of jurors.

Smiling again, Sirhan leaned back in his chair, occasionally biting on his thumb as he talked to Defense Investigator Michael A. McCowan.

"We did our best and lost, that's all," Cooper told newsmen in a press conference later. "I don't know any other way we could have tried it." Sirhan, he said, was "disappointed, naturally," but Cooper declined to relay just what his 25-year-old client had told his attorneys after the verdict came in.

Chief Prosecutor Lynn D. (Buck) Compton said he felt the finding "expressed the conscience of the community."

System Seen Working

"I think it demonstrates to the world that our system can work, does work and did work in this case," he said.

Compton said he was confident that the jurors would "express the conscience of the Nation" again at the penalty trial. The choice between life and death, he declared, would be left to their "absolute discretion."

The burly Chief Deputy District Attorney acknowledged that the prosecution could not in good conscience demand the gas chamber for Sirhan after it once had agreed to life imprisonment in an abortive round of plea bargaining before the trial proper began.

At the same time, he indicated that the State would do its best to make clear to the jurors that they should feel no compunction about sending Sirhan to his death if they choose.

Prosecutor John Howard, who will present the State's case at the penalty trial, said he intended to stress certain "facts"—such as Sirhan's "lack of remorse and the effect of political assassinations on the democratic process."

Brought to the courthouse each morning in a black-and-

white county bus, the jurors began their deliberations Monday in a drab, cheaply furnished room with an ancient brown wall clock and two overhead lights.

They had been locked up each night on a sixth-floor wing of the nearby Biltmore Hotel since Feb. 12, but the tedium was relieved by special Friday night movies at the Paramount studios in Hollywood, Sunday excursions to the beach, chess tournaments, scrabble games and Spanish classes that they organized. They were plainly in no hurry to reach a verdict.

The issues before them had been spelled out laboriously at the sometimes dramatic often tedious always ambivalent trial.

The assassination had cost the Nation a presidential candidate at the peak of his popularity. It also cost the taxpayers of Los Angeles approximately \$1 million to investigate what seemed an open-and-shut case, guard Sirhan's family and put him on trial.

The testimony began with a

bang and ended in boredom. But it also left a mystery for the jurors to resolve, the mystery of just what manner of man it was who had put a bullet in Robert Kennedy's brain.

At the outset, the prosecution announced that it intended to press for the death penalty, demanding of each prospective juror whether they had "the courage" to send Sirhan to the octagonal, green gas chamber at San Quentin.

Soon Abandoned

It was a theme soon abandoned. Selection of the jury began Jan. 13. But the "hard line" questioning became muted after Jan. 19 when prosecution psychiatrist Seymour Pollack was permitted to examine Sirhan in his jail cell for the first time.

Both prosecution and defense psychiatrists and psychologists alike turned out agreed Sirhan was paranoid although they parted company over the extent of his mental illness.

In the end, the state con-

tended that no matter how sick he was, he still had enough of a grip on reality to plot, practice and premeditate the cold-blooded killing.

The testimony started out in quick, compelling bursts.

Suddenly, it all came back with sickening familiarity. The pop-pop-pop of the .22 caliber Iver-Johnson. The pool of blood beneath the dying Senators' head. The rosary thrust in his hands. The sad-faced busboy cradling him and murmuring, "Come on Senator, you can make it, you can make it." The pandemonium.

A resident alien who wasn't even supposed to have a gun, Sirhan had bought it for \$25 four months earlier in a sidewalk transaction outside his home.

Practiced With Gun

He practiced with it, the testimony showed; scribbled out venomous threats to kill Kennedy in his notebooks; apparently stalked him at the Ambassador Hotel two nights before killing; then came back on June 4 with a loaded gun to

stand by an ice machine and wait.

As the candidate approached, the assassin darted out from ambush, shouted "Kennedy, you son of a bitch," and fired a hollow-point bullet that tore into his head. Five others were wounded as the shots kept pouring out of Sirhan's gun.

It was, said the state, "plain, old, cold-blooded, first-degree murder," the last word in the politics of protest.

Sirhan, himself, always ready to testify to his hatred of Jews, told the courtroom that he came to hate Kennedy, too, for his support of Israel in the Middle Eastern turmoil. "A friend of my enemy is my enemy," the defendant blurted out on the witness stand, quoting an old Arab proverb.

His three attorneys, high-priced lawyers serving without fee, countered the state's case with a barrage of startling claims. They served to make every fact two-faced, every seemingly damning bit of evidence a possible sign of sickness.

The explosive assassin served up signs of his own. He demanded his own execution, cursed his prosecutors, tried to fire his own lawyers, and salted his testimony with four-letter words.

Smiles and Scowls

He smiled when the state called him sane enough, scowled when his own lawyers called him a mental misfit. Repeatedly the judge threatened to bind and gag the defendant, but he never did.

Then, in a dramatic week on the stand, Sirhan conceded that he had wanted to kill Kennedy since May when he tuned into a television documentary on the presidential candidate. It depicted him as a supporter of Israel as far back as 1948.

Sirhan said he felt betrayed. "Up until that time," he insisted, "I loved Robert Kennedy. I hoped he would win the Presidency . . . (but) he was doing a lot of things behind my back that I don't know about and it burned me up, sir."

Sirhan's Family Weeps Over Verdict

PASADENA, Calif., April 17 (UPI)—"We feel terrible about the verdict," Adel Sirhan said today.

The family of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was gathered around a television set and a radio in the modest home of Mary Sirhan, mother of the admitted slayer of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

With Mrs. Sirhan were the convicted man's brothers, Adel and Munir.

On hearing the news, all three wept.

"There is nothing more I can say," Adel Sirhan said, his voice breaking. "We didn't expect this verdict."