

# Sirhan Jury Selection Begins Slowly

By George Lardner Jr.

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LOS ANGELES, Jan. 13—The first man in the jury box was uncomfortably candid.

Softly, but in a clear voice, he said he didn't think he could give Sirhan Bishara Sirhan a fair trial.

Chief defense attorney Grant B. Cooper, 65, couldn't quite believe what he'd heard. He posed the question again.

"There will be no denial," he explained carefully, "that our client fired the shots that killed Sen. (Robert F.) Kennedy."

But, Cooper made plain, the defense had no intention of conceding to the State's charge of first-degree murder. Would Sirhan's admission that he killed the Democratic presidential aspirant get in the way of fairly determining the ac-

cused assassin's motives and state of mind?

George E. Dowdle, a short, bespectacled research and development worker at the Aerospace Corp., said that it would. He was excused.

"It's going to be a long, hard winter," Cooper said during a recess.

Jury-picking for the assassination trial began on the eighth floor of the Hall of Jus-

tice today with all signs pointing to weeks of frustration before a panel is finally chosen.

Security in the courtroom was beefed up for the chore. Sheriff's deputies had been planning to search the prospective jurors before they filed in, 25 at a time, but Sirhan's battery of defense lawyers objected. The veniremen, said Cooper, "might be disgruntled or annoyed." Twelve jurors and six alternates are to be chosen and then locked up at a downtown hotel for the rest of the trial.

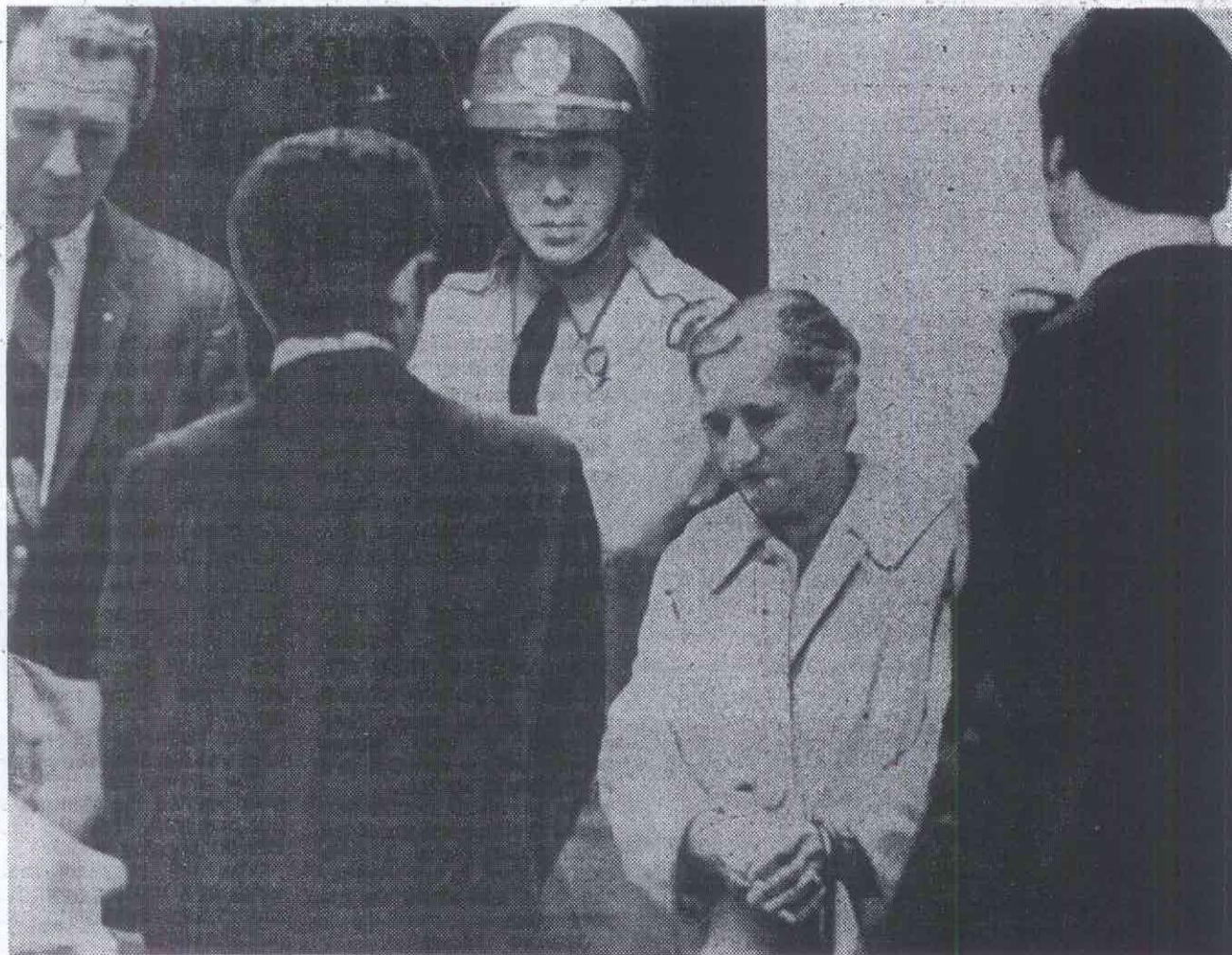
The next two candidates after Dowdle were excused after they complained of the hardships of being isolated from their jobs and families.

Judge Herbert V. Walker cleared the way for jury-picking this morning by rejecting a defense motion attacking California's system of exempting various professional groups from jury service—such as doctors, nurses and teachers—on request.

Walker said the defense has failed to present any evidence that all such individuals were automatically excluded from jury duty.

Cooper told newsmen that he hopes to get at least a few jurors who are opposed to the death penalty. "Why have it stacked all with people who believe in capital punishment?" he asked.

Some of the questioning was confined to Judge Walker's private office. Here each prospective juror will be taken to be asked whether he has read anything about the assassination and whether he has reached any conclusions about Sirhan's guilt or innocence.



Associated Press

Mother and two brothers (backs to camera) wait outside courtroom where Sirhan B. Sirhan is on trial for his life.