

Sirhan Tilts With Prosecution

By George Lardner Jr.

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LOS ANGELES, Jan. 15—A smiling Sirhan B. Sirhan broke in on the questioning today of prospective jurors for his murder trial.

Deputy District Attorney David N. Fitts had just started off his with now standard query of whether the juror could look the young Jordanian in the face and still send him to the gas chamber for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Abruptly, Sirhan hunched forward in his seat, looked at the juror and smiled broadly.

Nettled, Fitts stopped. "For all I know," he cautioned the juror, "he'll smile at you throughout this trial."

"I smile at you, too, Mr. Fitts," Sirhan replied.

Defendant Hushed

From the bench, Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker peered over his glasses and told Fitts: "Confine yourself to questions, counsel." Defense attorney Russell Parsons hushed Sirhan. "Take it easy," Parsons whispered.

Sirhan remained unruffled, showing no apparent concern even when the juror, an IBM

systems analyst, finally said that he could indeed send the 24-year-old defendant to his death.

Three more prospective jurors, including the systems analyst, survived the voir dire, or questioning, today to make a total of seven that have been selected for the tentative 12-member panel.

Chief defense attorney Grant B. Cooper told newsmen that he was surprised that not one of the jurors questioned so far has voiced opposition to capital punishment. The defense has been hoping to get at least a few who profess a reluctance to impose the death penalty.

For his part, Sirhan today seemed unworried about it. His ebullience contrasted sharply with his mood earlier this week when Fitts first stressed that the State would "urge" that he be sent to the gas chamber. Sirhan reacted then as though he were about to get sick.

Waves at Mother

This morning, he strode into the courtroom, waved at his mother and called out a loud "How are you?" in Arabic to Abdeen Jabara who was sitting in the spectators' row re-

served for Sirhan's family and associates.

Jabara, a 28-year-old lawyer from Detroit, said he became acquainted with the Sirhans after Sen. Kennedy's assassination. He first surfaced publicly as attorney for an impromptu organization called the Organizing Committee for Clemency for Sirhan last June.

The Committee distributed circulars with Sirhan's picture and a polemic text that began:

"Who seeks the blood of this boy?"

The Committee's releases hailed Sirhan as "the Arab-American prototype of John Brown" and bitterly attacked suggestions that Sirhan might be mentally ill.

Jabara said today that the Committee has by now disbanded and that he was attending the trial simply as an "observer." He has told one newsman, however, that he was serving as a "consultant to the family."