

# Sirhan Defense Attorneys Force Prosecution to Admit Jury Bluff

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LOS ANGELES, Jan. 21—Sirhan B. Sirhan's defense attorneys forced the prosecution to admit today that it was bluffing on its offer to go to trial with the jury as it now stands.

Prosecutor Lynn D. Compton backed down after Sirhan's chief defense counsel, Grant B. Cooper, announced in court that the prospective jurors in the box were acceptable to Sirhan, too.

Red-faced, Compton withdrew the offer, and the soporific search for 12 panelists acceptable to both sides started again.

Cooper protested, but Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker gave his consent to the about-face, indicating that he didn't want to force unwanted jurors on either the prosecution or the defense.

Compton acknowledged to newsmen later that the prosecution's offer to take the jurors simply had been a tactical gambit that flopped.

"We're not trying to play games," the pipe-smoking prosecutor insisted. "He (Cooper) tried to make a big deal of it. All we want is 12 reasonable people."

District Attorney Evelle J. Younger's chief deputy, Compton had offered in court last Friday to take "the jury as now constituted" after a week

of questioning and speed up Sirhan's murder trial for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

At that point, 11 panelists had been tentatively seated and a 12th, Miss Helen L. Woodworth, was waiting for a doctor's certificate attesting to her ability to withstand the rigors of a long trial. Both sides had just started using the 20 "peremptory challenges" each gets to dismiss prospective jurors without disclosing the reasons.

The prosecution offer, it became evident today, was actually a ploy to have the last word in the crucial chore of picking a jury.

Compton had expected the defense to reject the offer by using up one of its "peremptories" out of order. This would have given the prosecution the right to make the last challenge, a prerogative normally accorded to the defense.

Instead, Cooper called the prosecution's bluff. Compton jumped up and tried to sugar it over by claiming that the offer no longer stood. At the outset of today's session, the first since Friday, Miss Woodworth was excused for medical reasons and another woman, Mrs. Geraldine Scherer of Whittier, had taken her place.

Thus, Compton contended, "the jury as now constituted" was no longer the same. Be-

sides, he said, the prosecution had decided that there were some other prospective jurors it wanted to bump after all.

Judge Walker required Compton, instead, to make a formal motion withdrawing the offer.

The prosecutor did, and with the Court's approval, promptly dismissed another juror who had been seated Friday, Miss Doris Jacobi, a Jewish woman who was said to have had a wide background in dealing with disadvantaged youth.

Compton declined to say why he challenged her, but he hinted to reporters that the defense would not have been entirely happy with her either. In any event, Sirhan's lawyers still retain the right to make the last challenge.

The sparring found Sirhan huddling repeatedly with defense counsel Russell Parsons and happily holding up a Cuesta Rey cigar celebrating the arrival of a defense consultant's overdue baby.

The wavy-haired Jordanian immigrant had other things on his mind, too. At one point, he leaned over to the chief defense investigator, Michael McCowan, and told him, "Mike, make sure you get my alien registration card mailed in on time."

McCowan grinned: "Maybe he's afraid he's going to get deported or something."