

Defense Lawyers Assail Makeup Of Panel That Indicted Sirhan

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By George Lardner
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 29—Sirhan B. Sirhan's assassination trial shuffled a step backwards today as the young Jordanian's lawyers assailed the makeup of the grand jury that indicted him.

They announced plans to poll more than 130 Los Angeles County Superior Court judges in an effort to prove their point.

At today's session, chief defense counsel Grant B. Cooper unfolded a long list of statistics to bolster his claim that the so-called "blue ribbon" jury that indicted Sirhan was made up almost exclusively of the judges' friends.

"The system, as it has operated over the past 10 years," he charged, "has the result of being discriminatory."

Prosecutors brushed off the complaint. Chief Deputy District Attorney Lynn D. Compton told newsmen that the 23-member grand jury that sifted

Sirhan's case last June included two Negroes and one Arab-American, a woman of Lebanese extraction.

Sirhan's lawyers, however, said they intended to press their argument in painstaking detail.

The move is aimed at quashing the first-degree murder indictment of Sirhan in the killing of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. It is almost certain to be denied, but the testimony involved before a ruling can be handed down appears likely to continue until next Wednesday.

Cooper insisted that Constitutional issues were involved. In Los Angeles, grand jurors are chosen by lot for a full year's service from nominations made by each Superior Court judge.

Cooper contended that the poor, the disadvantaged, the young, and the less educated were improperly excluded by the system now in effect. Robert Schultz, a professor from

the University of Southern California called as a witness by the defense, said an analysis he made of last year's 168 grand jury nominees showed that the biggest number came from high-income neighborhoods.

Compton called the defense theory "ridiculous." Carried to its extreme, he protested, "you could say illiterates ought to be on the (grand) jury."

The prosecution also took the tack that Sirhan had no right to complain since there had been no showing, or even allegation, of grand jury prejudice against him. Compton reminded Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker that the 24-year-old Arab himself has now admitted killing Sen. Kennedy.

Judge Walker, however, ruled that the defense at least deserved to be heard.

Sirhan seemed somewhat bored with it all. He mustered a smile from time to time, but with a sleepy look on his face.