

Sirhan Said to Value Arab Forum Over Life

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sirhan Sirhan intends to "go to the gas chamber—silent" unless he is permitted to turn his trial into an anti-Zionist showcase, Ramparts magazine asserted yesterday.

The accused assassin of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy recently told one of his brothers that he wants to make the trial "a public and political forum for the Arab position," the magazine said in an article in its current issue.

"In fact," the story continued, "he has confided to his family that he will never make any statement unless

special provisions are made for the courtroom proceedings.

"What Sirhan wants is, quite simply, publicity. He wants the major networks to be allowed to broadcast the entire trial. If they do so, he will tell all."

The article, in the magazine's Sept. 7 issue, was written by Mahmoud Abdel-Hadi, an Egyptian correspondent for Akhbar Elyoum. As an Arab, he was said to have secured exclusive interviews with members of the 24-year-old suspect's family.

According to the article, Sirhan told his brother, Adel, that unless he gets his

way, "then I shall go to the gas chamber—silent."

A Mere Symbol

But if he gets his forum, Abdel-Hadi reports, Sirhan and his attorney, Russell Parsons, plan to argue that the shooting of Robert Kennedy was "a political gesture and that Kennedy to Sirhan was merely a symbol."

The startling claim, a virtual apology for assassination, also happens to be what many Arab and Arab American spokesmen have been pressing as a thesis since Kennedy's death June 6. Babbly put, it blames "Zionism" rather than Sirhan for the killing. And it sees the trial as a golden "opportunity" to present the Arab case.

The Ramparts story, however, maintains that Sirhan's strategy is "his own... something he developed after thinking about it for long hours in his specially made jail cell."

Sirhan's family, Abdel-Hadi writes, is confused and bitter, surprised that they have not gotten any financial help from Arab consulates in Los Angeles. The suspect himself is described as disappointed that the Arab people have not greeted him as a hero.

Bitter over the Arab-Israeli war last year, Sirhan was also said to have been highly distraught over a Kennedy campaign visit to a Jewish temple in Portland, Ore., where he put on a yarmulke and professed support for selling 50 U.S. jet fighters to Israel.

Seen on Television

Kennedy's donning of the yarmulke does not seem to have been reported in the Los Angeles newspapers. According to Ramparts, Sirhan saw the episode on television.

It "made him very angry," the Ramparts story quoted another brother, Sharif Sirhan, as saying. "He left the room putting his hands on

his ears and almost weeping."

"Everything in this country was pushing him to the danger point," Sirhan's mother, Mary, reportedly said. "Everything, the propaganda of the Zionists, every thing was against his country, against his people."

Adel is quoted again: "If Sirhan was just an assassin, how could he have done it another way, just by having a gun with a telescope. He went to the Ambassador Hotel expecting to get caught, that is why he left his notes at home. I believe that Sirhan wanted to get caught so that he could say what he believed."