

Sirhan Saw Deed as Duty, Witness Says

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Sirhan Bishara Sirhan is so "ick" that he thinks he should get no more than two years in prison for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, a prosecution psychiatrist acknowledged today.

The psychiatrist, Dr. Seymour Pollack, conceded that at one point he did not even think Sirhan would have to stand trial.

"This man is a sick man," Dr. Pollack conceded under a grueling round of cross-examination.

The stocky, red-faced psychiatrist held firmly, however, to his insistence that Sirhan is not sick enough to escape the first-degree murder charge facing him.

Armed with a two-month-old report in which Pollack had called Sirhan "psychotic," Sirhan's lawyers had expected to demolish him on the witness stand today, but despite his concessions, the duel was far from one-sided.

What to do with Sirhan, Pollack said, depends not so much on him or any other psychiatrist, but on whatever "line" of responsibility the jurors at his murder trial choose to draw.

Believed It Good

Sirhan the psychiatrist testified at one point, "believed it was good to kill Senator Kennedy. And he believed he should not be punished because he was doing what was right."

Chief Defense Council

Grant B. Cooper pounced. Such twisted thinking, he argued, was surely a sign that Sirhan was deeply psychotic, far too ill to be held to account for the killing.

If what the psychiatrist said was so, Cooper declared, Sirhan "wouldn't know the difference between right and wrong."

"He'd be legally insane, wouldn't he?" the lawyer challenged.

"No, no, no, no," Pollack replied. Sirhan, he said, still knew that "society considered it wrong, that he was going to be punished if he was caught. If he's aware of that, he's still legally sane."

Unlike other assassins in the Nation's history, Sirhan, Dr. Pollack said, has made no claim that he was sent by God to gun down the Democratic presidential candidate in the Ambassador hotel last June 5.

Viewed as a Duty

Sirhan, the witness said, conceived of the assassination as "almost his duty," but as a political duty. "As an Arab, he felt he would be looked up to by the Arab world. He thought he would be a hero."

Dr. Pollack said he could not classify that as a psychotic delusion. In fact, many Arabs have come to praise Sirhan for what he did.

Cooper kept pressing, hitting hard at Pollack's disclosure that Sirhan told him he "ought to get only a couple of years in prison" for the killing.

The 65-year-old defense lawyer pointed out that this hardly smacked of the "mature and meaningful" deliberation that, under California law, is presumed to underlie any charge of premeditated murder.

"That isn't meaningful thinking, is it?" Cooper demanded. "Do you mean to suggest that's a meaningful interpretation of our laws when he says he ought to get just two years for the cold-blooded killing of a Senator of the United States?"

Pollack said that depended on what was to be defined as "meaningful" and "mature." He said he doubted there was any criminal who could be described as "fully psychologically mature."

"Well, what kind of thinking is it?" Cooper shot back.

"The same kind of thinking exhibited by a Black Nationalist who believes he should not get too much jail (time) for killing someone involved in racial discrimination in America," the psychiatrist told him.

Cooper suggested the reply

was a red herring. "Can you tell me of a single Black Nationalist who killed someone in cold blood as Sirhan did?" he challenged.

"I think Malcolm X was killed somewhat in that fashion," Dr. Pollack said.

Earlier the psychiatrist acknowledged that he did not think Sirhan would have to stand trial when he submitted a 17-page report Feb. 5 to District Attorney Evelle J. Younger in which he called Sirhan "psychotic."

Both prosecution and defense lawyers were dickering around that time over an arrangement whereby Sirhan would have pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in exchange for a court-imposed penalty of life in prison rather than death in the gas chamber.

The proposed compromise fell through when Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker vetoed it, declaring that the jury, not the court, should determine what penalty Sirhan should get.