

Sirhan Erupts As Prosecutor Charges Lies

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, April 9 —

With Sirhan Bishara Sirhan straining angrily in his seat, the State of California accused him today of lying repeatedly in a desperate attempt to escape responsibility for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

In a withering closing argument, Prosecutor David N. Fitts assailed the claims put forth by Sirhan, his psychologists and psychiatrists, and urged the jurors to repudiate them with a conviction for first-degree murder.

Sirhan rose up from his chair at one point, mumbling obscenities and muttering, "He's lying . . . he's lying, the dirty — I'm not going to put up with this s—t."

The 25-year-old defendant was quickly put down again, then hustled out of the courtroom to cool off during a 25-minute recess.

The outburst was quickly forgotten as Fitts picked up again, regaling the jurors with a sardonic delivery that drew laughs, snickers and smiles.

"You understand, I'm perhaps quibbling," the silver-haired prosecutor said drily. "They say he's sick. And we concede he's sick . . . I can't imagine anybody stepping from a tray rack in the Ambassador Hotel and firing a .22 caliber pistol into the head of Senator Kennedy without being what I would call sick."

But, Fitts went on, "what does 'sick' mean? The jails are full of people who have committed atrocious acts: mutilations, rape, child molestation, murder. Society is plagued with this sort of violence and it's not getting any better.

"We expect somebody who commits murder to be a little

bit different."

Basic Premise of Trial

Warming up as he went along, Fitts suggested that the hard evidence, "the basic premise of this trial," had been forgotten in the welter of psychiatric testimony that has commanded center stage in the past few weeks.

Point by point, the 46-year-old deputy district attorney went over it. After firing eight shots, three of them into Kennedy's body, Sirhan, according to witnesses, shouted out: "I can explain. I can explain."

Other witnesses, Fitts recalled, heard the Jordanian immigrant say: "I did it for my country." When he was asked again why he did it, the prosecutor recounted, one officer quoted Sirhan as replying: "You think I'm crazy? So you can use it in evidence against me?"

Far from being crazy, Fitts contended, Sirhan "at that time was fully aware of his

constitutional rights, fully aware of his predicament, fully aware that anything he said might be used against him."

Turning to Sirhan's own story, the prosecutor charged that the assassin's testimony as "replete with what I consider to be lies, some of which are demonstrable and some of which are not."

Among these, Fitts suggested, was Sirhan's protestation that he had left his wallet and all his identification in his car near the Ambassador simply because he and his brothers were always in the habit of doing that.

Yet a former employer of

Sirhan's, John Weidner, recalled that Sirhan had his wallet in his pocket during an argument with Weidner that led to his calling police.

Sirhan, Fitts contended, left it behind on the night of the assassination because "it's the kind of precaution a reasonable assassin might take."

Defendant Infuriated

It was here that Sirhan blew up, infuriated at being called after the recess, stressing that

shrugging it off, Fitts picked up the theme again after the recess, stressing that Sirhan had been contradicted by other witnesses repeatedly during the trial. The slim Palestinian, the prosecutor reminded the jurors, once even denied to a defense investigator that he had visited the Ambassador Hotel three days before the assassination during an earlier Kennedy appearance there.

Sirhan, Fitts said, "appreciated that it might well have some sinister significance. If it was as innocent as the defendant now says it was, why would he have denied it to a defense investigator?"

Moving on, the prosecutor steamed into the psychiatric evidence presented at the trial, heaping scorn on the testimony of defense psychologist Martin Schorr.

Schorr, who tested Sirhan in his cell last November, called him a paranoid schizophrenic on the basis of hotly disputed ink-blot and personality tests he gave him.

Fitts called Schorr's method "disgraceful," pointing out that the psychologist claimed to have erased all his tapes of his interviews with Sirhan during the ink-blot test. He said he needed to reuse the tapes for other murders, other trials.

Fitts said he found this incredible. Schorr, he told the jurors, "may have left a bad taste in your mouth for the whole profession of clinical psychology."