

Insanity Plea by Sirhan Indicated

Compiled from AP and UPI

LOS ANGELES—For the accused assassin of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, the defense may be an insanity plea to escape the gas chamber.

Sirhan B. Sirhan, a lumpy-faced former racetrack exercise boy, was indicted for Kennedy's murder yesterday. He then made a brief, but dramatic appearance at a jailhouse chapel arraignment under extreme security measures.

Sirhan was wheeled in and out of the half-hour arraignment proceeding in a collapsible wheelchair. The swarthy Jordanian immigrant asked for, and was granted a delay until June 28 in formally answering the charge.

Superior Court Judge Arthur L. Alarcon, at a defense request, named two psychiatrists to examine the 24-year-old defendant.

"The doctors are to act as agents of the attorneys for the defense," Alarcon said.

He said the psychiatrists were only to assist in determining the plea. He also stressed he was not making a decision at this time on Sirhan's sanity.

Sirhan, dressed in a white, open-neck shirt and blue prison trousers, stared impassive-

ly at the 200 newsmen who jammed the makeshift courtroom. He had a bandage on his left ankle, a splint on his broken left index finger and a bruise on the left side of his face—all incurred in his capture seconds after the assassination.

Flanked by three deputy sheriffs and pushed by a fourth, the wheelchair was maneuvered to three steps which led to the chapel altar. Sirhan walked a few steps to a straight-backed chair just below the marble-topped altar, behind which Judge Alarcon presided.

"Department 100 of Superior Court is now in session," the judge intoned. "The record will show that Department 100 of Superior Court is sitting at this time in a temporary courtroom provided by the sheriff because of the defendant's present physical condition and to avoid the possibility that any incident might occur that would deny the defendant the right to a fair trial."

Security precautions were so intense that even Judge Alarcon was searched before entering the room. Policemen, including a captain, had their guns confiscated and a platoon of 16 deputies ringed the courtroom.

The security precautions

probably were the strictest ever imposed in an American court proceeding.

Four beefy deputies stood directly behind Sirhan. Had an assassin somehow smuggled a weapon into the chapel he would have had to dispose of the lawmen before getting to the accused.

Spectators were unable to see Sirhan's face during much of the proceeding, but UPI reporter Joan Sweeney, seated

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in the first row, noted Sirhan occasionally tapped his slippered foot nervously.

The defendant corrected Alarcon when the judge pronounced his name as "Seerhahn." "No, your honor," Sirhan interrupted, "it is Sirhan."

The slender, 5-foot, 3-inch Jordanian native said "Yes, sir," when asked if he understood his constitutional rights, and "Yes, your honor," when Alarcon asked if Sirhan agreed to the temporary courtroom facilities.

"No," Sirhan said firmly when asked if he had funds to retain a lawyer. Alarcon appointed Wilbur Littlefield, deputy public defender, as chief counsel for the defense.

There was no direct reference during yesterday's nine hours of complex legal proceedings—from the convening of the grand jury until the arraignment—to the events in Dallas of November 1963.

But it was clear Los Angeles County law enforcement chiefs were taking every step possible to prevent any incident that could mar the legal record in the wake of the second Kennedy assassination in five years.

Lee Harvey Oswald, identified by the Warren Commission as President John F. Kennedy's assassin Nov. 22, 1963 in Dallas, was shot and killed two days later in the basement of the Dallas city jail. He was in the process of being transferred to the county jail.

The murder charge lodged against Sirhan in the case, officially numbered A 233421, "The people against Sirhan

Bishara Sirhan." carries a possible death sentence in the gas chamber at San Quentin Prison.

But court challenges of California's death penalty have suspended all executions in the state indefinitely. Seventy-seven men are on death row.

In California, a death sentence carries an automatic appeal to the State Supreme Court.