

Harris Survey

Reaction to RFK Assassination

By LOUIS HARRIS

The assassination of Sen. Robert Kennedy shook the American people to the core. In polling which extended from Wednesday through Sunday evening, the Harris Survey recorded a shocked reaction to the tragic events.

Three main strands dominated the public thinking:

1—Two out of every three people expressed the feeling that "something was deeply wrong with America" for the assassination to take place.

Back in March, even at the height of frustration over the war in Vietnam, this sense of "something deeply wrong" did not rise over the 39 percent mark. Last week, 53 percent expressed the view that "law enforcement has broken down and lawlessness has taken over."

2—Real concern was expressed over the state of politics today. By 59 to 31 percent, the American people felt that "our political system is failing when the President can't announce where he is going, for security reasons."

By a comparable 57 to 34 percent, the public held the view that "our political process has fallen apart when candidates can't campaign without fear of assassination."

3—The people engaged in considerably more self-examination than they did in similar circumstances almost five years ago when President John F. Kennedy was cut down by a sniper's bullets.

Just after that assassination, the Harris Survey polled public opinion on a set of identical questions. The number of Americans who felt more "guilty about not doing more for tolerance," "more against discrimination" and "more for Negro rights" all rose more substantially last week than in 1963.

FLOOD OF EMOTION

In the process of introspection, close to half the people poured out a flood of emotions and vows that they wanted to be "more considerate of other people's feelings" and "more understanding of people different from me."

Sirhan a Member Of the Rosicrucians

SAN JOSE — (AP) — The man accused of killing Senator Robert F. Kennedy recently joined the Rosicrucian Order, a fraternal organization with a philosophy based on metaphysics and development of "psychic powers," an official of the order said yesterday.

Arthur Piepenbrink, 46, supreme secretary, said Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was granted membership several months ago after sending a letter to the group's headquarters here, but had become inactive by not paying his dues.

The Ancient Mystical Order of Rosae Crucia, the organization's official name, follows a metaphysical and physical philosophy intended to awaken an individual's dormant psychic powers, a spokesman said.

Piepenbrink said Sirhan had not joined the Los An-

geles chapter and had not been in contact with the group since his original letter of application.

From his jail cell, the prisoner reportedly asked for two books on theosophy, "The Secret Doctrine" by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, founder of the theosophical movement in America, and C. W. Leadbeater's "Talks on 'At the Feet of the Master'."

Roughly a third also expressed a determination to "go into community affairs" and to feel "less personal hostility to candidates with whom they disagree."

As in 1963, a majority of the public said it felt "more patriotic" and more bitter against "extremist groups." Clearly, there was much feeling that America in a time of crisis should stand together.

However, it should be pointed out that the differences in reaction between 1963 and 1968 to two comparable assassinations are not so large that sweeping majorities appear to have been personally moved to re-examine their own behavior. There is more guilt than solid resolution. There is more alarm than clear direction.

Undoubtedly the American people are seeking some meaning for their own lives out of what otherwise seems to most as a series of senseless acts. There is a feeling that two outstanding brothers dedicated to public service should not have died in vain.

This sense of rededication to the principles of John and Robert Kennedy has been felt most deeply by Catholics in the past week. Many Catholics who live in Northern industrial cities had identified themselves in the past as part of what has come to be known as "the white backlash," resisting black thrusts for further gains.

In contrast to Catholics was the reaction of that 13 percent of the nation which still stands opposed to strict gun control legislation (81 percent now favor such laws).

Those opposing gun control legislation saw virtually no personal meaning in Robert Kennedy's assassination. Fewer than one in five of them said they felt more guilty or felt more favorable toward extending Negro or other minority rights.

No doubt the mood of shock will pass. How much of the feeling of remorse and dedication to make the nation a more decent and safer place will extend into the future remains to be seen.