

NEW ORLEANS

Sirhan Given Death Despite Kennedy Plea

LOS ANGELES (AP) — His face expressionless, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was sentenced to die for the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, slain at a moment of political victory.

Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker pronounced the death sentence yesterday for the 25-year-old Palestinian Arab despite a plea from Kennedy's brother, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, of Mass., that one life not be taken for another.

WALKER ORDERED Sirhan held in a death-row cell at California's San Quentin Prison—near its gas chamber—pending an appeal to the state's Supreme Court.

"It is the judgment and sentence of this court," Walker told Sirhan, "that you should suffer the penalty of death . . . in the manner prescribed by law."

"Sirhan shed not one tear," Grant B. Cooper, Sirhan's chief defense attorney, said later accompanying the slim slayer to a heavily guarded cell in the courthouse.

SIRHAN'S MOTHER, Cooper said, "broke down and cried when she left him in his cell." Mary Sirhan, 55, had heard the death sentence for her son with bowed head in a seat next to the wall, halfway back in the spectator's section of the courtroom.

Beside her, another son, Munir, 22, listened calmly.

The sentence came after Judge Walker denied a defense motion for a new trial and heard a mercy plea from the slain senator's family.

"**MY BROTHER** was a man of love and sentiment and compassion," said a letter, handwritten by Sen. Edward Kennedy, and read into the record by Cooper. "He would not have wanted his death to be a cause for the taking of another life."

"You may not call his pleas when he learned of the death of Martin Luther King. He said that what we need in the United States is not division . . . not hate . . . not violence or lawlessness but love and wisdom and compassion towards one another."

"Moreover, he was a young

man totally committed to life and living . . . If the kind of man my brother was is pertinent, we believe it should be weighed in the balance on the side of compassion, mercy and God's gift of life itself."

THE 69-YEAR-OLD judge said: "Let the record show I've read and considered the letter . . ."

In pronouncing sentence, Walker said: "It is the feeling of this court that the jury was right. I find no reason to change my mind now."

The jury that convicted Sirhan of first-degree murder also decreed death. Judge Walker could have reduced the penalty to life imprisonment. In similar cases, he has done this once.

Cooper told newsmen that appeal to the State Supreme Court could take several months.