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Coast Lawyer, 73, to Defend Sirhan Without Fee

By **ROBERT WINDELER**
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LOS ANGELES, June 19—Russell E. Parsons, a 73-year-old Los Angeles attorney, will serve as defense counsel for Sirhan B. Sirhan, the 24-year-old Jordanian accused of murdering Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

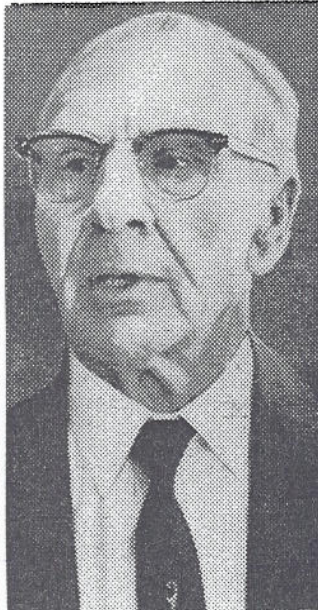
Mr. Parsons will be joined by another lawyer, whom he described as "a very able man, a good lawyer who is involved in something right now in which it would be detrimental if his name were announced in connection with the Sirhan case."

Sirhan picked both names from a list given him by A. L. Wirin, chief local counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union.

Mr. Wirin said today that he had witnessed Sirhan's signing a retainer for the two lawyers in his windowless 12-by-12-foot cell in the Los Angeles County Men's Central Jail sometime between Sirhan's arrest June 5 and June 10.

Neither Mr. Parsons nor Mr. Wirin would say why the news had been delayed, but June 10 was the last day Mr. Wirin visited the suspect and today was Mr. Parsons' first visit.

"I talked with my client this morning on his bed in his cell for about two hours," Mr. Par-



Associated Press
Russell E. Parsons

sons said. He would not elaborate.

"Since Sirhan has now secured the counsel of his choice guaranteed by the Constitution the A.C.L.U.'s interest in the case is ended," Mr. Wirin said.

Sirhan was reported to have asked Mr. Wirin to take the case, but Mr. Wirin declined on the ground that no constitutional or civil liberties issue was involved. He said that the

A.C.L.U.'s only interest was in seeing that Sirhan got the lawyer of his choice.

Mr. Wirin saw the defendant almost daily between June 5 and June 10 but said today he did not know whether he would see him again.

A third lawyer may join Mr. Parsons and his associate, Mr. Parsons said, but he has not yet been selected.

Mr. Parsons said he would serve "without fee and as a public service." He replaces Public Defender Wilbur Littlefield as Sirhan's chief counsel.

Sirhan had not expressed any particular displeasure with the Public Defender's office, generally regarded as one of the best in the United States, but had said repeatedly that he would like his own lawyer.

His ability to pay a private lawyer was questionable, but his father, Bishara Sirhan, had said in Jordan that he would pay the cost of lawyers from Arab countries.

Several such lawyers have indicated their willingness to come to Los Angeles in Sirhan's defense. Neither Mr. Wirin nor Mr. Parsons had been reached directly by them and said they could not comment on the admissibility of foreign lawyers.

A public defender is a counsel appointed by the court to represent indigent defendants. There are 208 full-time defense attorneys in the Los Angeles

County Public Defender's office, and they may not, by law, simultaneously engage in private practice.

California state law provides that counties may set up a public defender's office, and most of the state's 58 counties have done so.

In a case such as Sirhan's, if money is found or a lawyer is willing to work for nothing, a public defender is "substituted out." That is what happened to Mr. Littlefield.

The names of Melvin Belli and F. Lee Bailey were on the original A.C.L.U. list of volunteers. Mr. Wirin said that Sirhan wanted neither.

Mr. Parsons, a native of Los Angeles, said he had tried more than 5,000 cases, "many, many of them murder cases."

He is best known, however, for his defense of Charles Cahan, convicted of conspiring to engage in bookmaking on the basis of evidence secured by placing hidden microphones in private homes without a search warrant.

In 1955 the California Supreme Court reversed the conviction, contending that such evidence was illegally seized and should be excluded from the trial. The decision in *Mapp vs. Ohio* United States in the Supreme Court six years later made this search and seizure doctrine applicable in all the states.