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Sirhan No Longer Without A Paddle

WASHINGTON (Liberation News Service) — A spokesman for the Organizing Committee for Sirhan says that claims that Sirhan is insane are "sheer fabrications."

John M. Lawrence characterized a series of mass media references to Sirhan's insanity as "the attempt of pro-Jewish forces to rob Sirhan's act of political meaning." Lawrence declared, "CBS started this insanity thing Wednesday after the assassination, and the National Educational Television too. Senator Javits was making claims that Sirhan was insane and, of course, he is in the opposition movement against the Arab people. Now we have the same sort of statements in the Washington Post.

"I talked with Mary Sirhan just this morning, and she denies that she ever said her son is insane — and I spoke with Sirhan's brother last Saturday; he told me that Sirhan is fully rational in all aspects.

"Sirhan would not want to retain a lawyer who would use an insanity plea."

The Organizing Committee for Clemency for Sirhan is a nine-member group which is attempting to build a national legal defense organization for Sirhan, "to try to save the boy's life." Mr. Lawrence likened their efforts to those made in behalf of Sobel and in the Scottsboro case. During the legal proceedings which will determine Sirhan's sentence, if he is found guilty, the Committee plans to show evidence of "mitigating circumstances." Sirhan's act "grew out of the brutality of Israeli action against Palestinians . . . the type of thing which Mr. Kennedy himself typified and exacerbated."

The Organizing Committee maintains that a "show trial" is being staged in Los Angeles; "The utterly unprecedented, prejudicial and weird public release of the transcript of the Grand Jury minutes on indictment of Sirhan Sirhan for the assassination of Robert Kennedy is a part of the continuing pattern being executed by Los Angeles court, police and prosecution officials, acting in concert with the Public Defender's office and the Southern California Civil Liberties Union, to deliberately deprive Mr. Sirhan of his constitutional rights of Fair Hearing

. . . The Grand Jury minutes were released utterly without any colorable consent by Mr. Sirhan, where he has rejected the Public Defender as his attorney, the Civil Liberties Union does not as Amicus Curiae have any authority to bind him to consent, and no attorney validly speaks for Mr. Sirhan."

Though the Organizing Committee seeks to build a national defense organization for Sirhan, there is disagreement within the Arab community over the wisdom and timeliness of the group's action. Dr. Mohammed Mehdi, leader of the Action Committee on American Arab Relations described the Organizing Committee as "well meaning" but insisted that "there is no meeting of minds between our organization and theirs." Dr. Mehdi, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on American Constitutional Law, explained, "My understanding of the law is that clemency procedures would come in 3, 4, or 5 years. Any movement for clemency at this time is premature."

The assassination of Robert Kennedy must be considered a political act, Dr. Mehdi emphasized. "It is no usual case of murder . . . it is a political act, rationally planned and decided upon, in the same sense that President Truman's decision to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima was a political act."

The wisdom of the "political act" can be judged only in the future. Dr. Mehdi said: "If we in the U.S. re-evaluate our perspective on the Arab situation, something good might come from the evil. Otherwise it would be a wasted tragedy.

"Wisdom is ultimately what the historians of the future say about our actions."

A markedly different view was advanced by a spokesman for the American Friends of the Middle East, a U.S. group interested in policy in the middle East, and in the past financed partially by grants from CIA conduit foundations. "Only among the most fanatic would Sirhan be considered a hero . . . The situation is very messy right now. The Arab leadership and the entire Arab world were grief-stricken at the assassination, in part, at least, because they recall the assassination of President Kennedy. They were all terribly sad about that assassination, because they all believed that the Kennedy program was the only hope for the Arab world."

Some Arabs in the United States apparently have a different "hope for the Arab world."