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Sirhan Lead

By GENE HANDSAKER

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP - The possibility arose today that Sirhan Bishara Sirhan may change his innocent plea to guilty in the gunshot assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

"Such a possibility is always discussed in any case," defense attorney Russell E. Parsons said. "I have talked about such a possibility with the prosecution right from the beginning. But at the moment, the trial is going on."

Parsons said he and other defense lawyers were to meet with Sirhan during the day "to review the whole case." He said some announcement might grow out of this.

The state was understood to be prepared to give "serious consideration" to a guilty plea, first reported by the Los Angeles Times.

Such a change in plea, if it occurred, would result from either an understanding or a firm belief that a life term in prison - instead of death - would be the extreme penalty, the Times reported.

Parsons said a guilty plea would not preclude the defense from arguing for mercy for Sirhan.

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By GENE HANDSAKER

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP - Reports circulated today that Si

han Bishara Sirhan might change his innocent plea to guilty in the gunshot assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Such a change, if it occurred, would result from either an understanding or a firm belief that a life term in prison - instead of death - would be the maximum penalty, the Los Angeles Times reported.

The only likely obstacle would be Sirhan's own refusal to change his plea, the Times said. Sirhan, a slender 24-year-old from Jordan, was described as fearful a change of plea would rob him of the opportunity to publicly air reasons for the assassination.

The Times said Sirhan's defense attorneys huddled with the defendant, his mother, and brother Tuesday to discuss the possible guilty plea.

Speculation also rose Monday night when Evelle W. Younger, Los Angeles County district attorney, said without elaboration in a television interview that the Sirhan trial could take "three months or three days."

Court sources said a change in plea represented one way to drastically reduce the length of a trial that has already consumed nearly six weeks just in making preliminary motions and selecting a jury.

For either a conviction or a plea of guilty to murder in the first degree, the death penalty or mandatory under California state law.

Defense attorneys were said to pin their hopes for having Sirhan avoid the gas chamber on the argument that his mental or emotional capacity was so diminished as to rule out the degree of premeditation needed to warrant death.

Neither defense attorneys nor the prosecution would comment.

Opening statements by defense and prosecution, and possible first testimony, are scheduled to start Thursday, after a recess for Lincoln's birthday.

The eight-man, four-woman jury and their six alternates must check in by tonight to the hotel where they will be quartered until a verdict.

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Sirhan BJT NL 480

By ARTHUR EVERETT

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP - Sirhan Bishara Sirhan huddled with his lawyers

in jail Wednesday, reportedly to consider pleading guilty to a charge he murdered Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Justice with mercy would be the goal of such a move.

A guilty plea means at least life imprisonment. But the jury might spare Sirhan the death penalty, especially if the state offered any encouragement in that direction when the trial resumes Thursday.

"I am not ruling out any option," said Russell E. Parsons, one of three defense lawyers. "Such a possibility is always discussed in any case. I have talked about the possibility with the prosecution right from the beginning. But at the moment, the trial is going on."

A spokesman for Dist. Atty. Evelle J. Younger said: "No deal has been made with any parties."

Parsons, and his co-counsel, Grant Cooper and EGMILE Zola Berman, spent an hour and 10 minutes with Sirhan, 24, a Jordanian Arab who has pleaded innocent in the Kennedy assassination. All three lawyers emerged with genial but firm replies of w "no comment" to questions put to them by newsmen.

Standing by in the Hall of Justice during the conference were two of Sirhan's brothers, Adel, 30, and Munir, 22. Adel said he didn't know whether Sirhan was preparing to change his plea but added that the defendant had been under "a lot of pressure-he might do anything."

Although Sirhan pleaded innocent to killing Kennedy with "malice aforethought," premeditation—the defense has said he does not deny that he shot New York's junior senator June 5, 1968. Moments earlier, Kennedy had proclaimed victory in California's Democratic presidential primary.

Defense hopes of sparing Sirhan from the gas chamber rested on California's unusual diminished responsibility precedent—a sort of limited insanity plea.

Rather than undertaking the always difficult task of proving legal insanity, a defendant may plead that his mental or emotional capacity was so diminished as to rule out the degree of premeditation needed to warrant death.

THE SAME RECOURSE STILL IS AVAILABLE TO THE DEFENSE AFTER A PLEA OF GUILTY—since in California the jury hears additional testimony after a conviction before deciding whether to assess the death penalty.

Kennedy was shot on the first anniversary of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Sirhan was said to have been pro-Arab and inflamed by public statements in which Kennedy appeared sympathetic to the cause of ISRAEL

Sirhan's trial opened Jan. 7, but it was not until Jan. 24 that a jury of eight men and four women was selected. Picking of six alternate jurors was completed Tuesday. After the Lincoln's Birthday holiday, lawyers in the case are to make opening statements Thursday.

Sirhan stepped out of a crowd in a kitchen of the Ambassador hotel last June, the prosecution says, and fired three bullets into the 28-year-old Kennedy. The victim and his wife, Ethel, were leaving a ballroom where a joyful throng of supporters had hailed a primary victory, that appeared to boost his drive for the Democratic presidential nomination. One of the bullets hit his brain and Kennedy died the next day. Five other people injured.

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