

Outburst In Court By Sirhan

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Sirhan Bishara Sirhan's lawyers defended him yesterday as a "sick and obsessed" mystic who killed Senator Robert F. Kennedy in a hypnotic trance.

The young Palestinian Arab had to be physically restrained as defense counsel Emile Zola Berman went before a superior court jury here to call his client one of life's losers, a failure "preoccupied with fantastical obsessions of hatred, suspicion and distrust."

The frail, 24-year-old defendant jumped to the edge of the seat, plainly upset. He shook his head back and forth, and murmured "No, no." His eyes seemed to be glistening.

RESTRAINT

Inspector William Conroy, the sheriff's deputy in charge of security, put a fretful hand on the defendant's back and muttered to chief defense investigator Michael McCowan for help.

"I had to physically put him down," McCowan said later. "He'd never read the statement."

"We said he was emotionally ill, and quick to anger. That's what he is. But he doesn't believe it. He doesn't think there's anything wrong with him."

In a dramatic opening statement that lasted only 15 minutes, Berman said there was everything wrong.

"There is no doubt," he told the jurors, "that he did in fact fire the shot that killed Senator Kennedy" in the Ambassador Hotel here last June 5.

'IMPULSIVE'

But, the lawyer went on, "that killing was unplanned and undeliberate, impulsive

and without premeditation or malice — totally the product of a sick and obsessed mind and warped personality.

"At the actual moment of the shooting," Berman said, "he was out of contact with reality, in a trance . . . in which he had no voluntary control over his will, his judgment, his feelings and his actions."

Later, in their questioning of witnesses, the defense sought to hint that a bank of mirrors near the entrance to the embassy room may have

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been instrumental in putting him under a spell.

Sirhan, Berman said, even used to conduct "mystical experiments in his room," concentrating on a hanging lead sinker and making it swing back and forth "by the power of his mind," or looking at a candle flame and making it dance, "first to the right and then to the left."

'MYSTICISM'

After Senator Kennedy advocated sending some 50 phantom jets to Israel, the attorney declared, Sirhan went "back to mysticism" after abandoning it for a while.

At times, the jury was told, he would stare into the mirror in his room and think about the Senator "until at last, he saw his own face no longer, but that of Senator Kennedy himself . . ."

"Now this isn't Berman talking," the lawyer kept repeating. "Men of science," he said, would attest to it. Sirhan, he insisted, actually "admired and loved" the New York Senator.

The sickness, Berman said, began when war broke out between Palestinian Arabs and Zionists in Palestine in 1947.

Sirhan was only 3 years old then, but the street he lived on, the attorney said, was rocked by gunfire. In fact, he said, it "became the dividing line between the Jews on the

one side and the Arabs on the other."

One night, Berman told the jurors, many of them busily scribbling notes, the building he lived in became a machine gun nest. On another night, his home was bombed. The horrors of war sank in deeply.

It was then, Berman said, that he first went into a spell.

As a child, he said, Sirhan saw a little girl's leg blown off by a bomb, "the blood spurting from below her knee, as though from a faucet. He went into a spell, he stiffened, his face contorted, he was out of contact with reality, and lost all sense of where he was or what was happening to him."

On another occasion, a bomb exploded while Sirhan was playing near the Damascus Gate. He "remained in a trance for four days," said the 65-year-old attorney, who is, incidentally, Jewish. It happened still again, he told the jury, when a bomb exploded outside the window of the Sirhan flat and tore a man apart.

'DEFEAT'

On coming to America, Sirhan was a repeated failure — and outsider at high school "who just didn't fit in," a college reject who was dismissed in his sophomore year because of failing marks in four subjects. He got a job at a gas station and played the horses with his

earnings. "And once again," Berman said, "defeat."

From there, he tried to become a jockey, but he was thrown from a horse and that ended that. "Another failure."

It was here that Sirhan stirred in his seat and began protesting. Berman went on. Sirhan, he said, became more irritable, brooding and preoccupied. He took to reading books on mysticism and making jottings in notebooks.

The attorney read one entry, dated June 2, 1967. It was styled a "declaration of war against American humanity."

In it, the Jordanian immigrant wrote that "the victims of the party in favor of this

declaration will be or are now the President, the Vice-President, etc., down the ladder."

'WAR'

Sirhan also wrote that "the author of this" memorandum "expresses his wishes very bluntly that he wants to be recorded by history as the man who triggered of the last world war."

By that, Berman said, "I gather he meant the last war ever to be."

Three days later, the six-day Arab-Israeli war broke out. Sirhan saw and heard repeated accounts of the lightning Israeli victory.

"All this," Berman said, "triggered his spells. In his fantasies he was often a hero

and the savior of his people. In the realities of life, however, as our doctor will tell you, he was small, helpless, isolated, confused and bewildered by emotions over which he had absolutely no control."

REVOLVER

It was then that "the mystical experiments" were said to have started. Then, six months before the assassination, Sirhan and his brother bought a .22 caliber revolver.

Sirhan tried it out at various gun ranges around Los Angeles. "The shooting," Berman said, "gave him a strange sense of release," much more than mysticism had done.

Kennedy's advocacy of jets for Israel, however, came as a "heavy shock." Sirhan, Berman said, would act out his anger by staring into the mirror, and fantasize about killing the New York Senator.

But the defendant, the attorney declared, never really thought he would actually do it. The slaying, Berman asserted, came about "through a weird chain of circumstances" while Sirhan was "in a disturbed mental state . . . that same kind of trance" that he had as a boy in Palestine.

"We ask you to listen to the evidence, to adopt what science has to offer, to consult your conscience," Berman concluded. "In short, let true justice be done."