

## Sirhan's 'Mental Illness'

LOS ANGELES — (UPI) — Sirhan B. Sirhan's attorneys contend he was "mentally ill" when he shot Sen. Robert Kennedy at point blank range.

Today the defense began calling witnesses to support the argument that the assassination was "totally a product of a sick, obsessed mind and personality."

Among the first witnesses may be Sirhan's mother, Mary, his younger brother, Munir, and psychiatrists who have examined the 24 year old Palestinian Arab.

Sirhan himself may testify next week and therein lies the defense's problem.

He has exploded in anger several times in court when reference was made to his mental condition. The introduction of his diaries, in which he wrote "RFK must be assassinated" over and over again, triggered a spectacular outburst.

Defense attorney Russell E. Parsons has told newsmen that Sirhan, "like most mentally ill people, doesn't like to be told he's mentally ill. He doesn't like it when I tell him."

When Sirhan testifies on his own behalf, the defense may be hoping his apparently unstable emotional state may work to his advantage.

It is likely he will testify he was in a blackout and has no

recollection of shooting and mortally wounding Kennedy last June 5 in a crowded pantry of the Ambassador Hotel.

In its opening statement, the defense painted Sirhan as a victim of spells, trances and mystic delusions which steadily grew after he witnessed atrocities in his native land as a child.

The obsessions and fantasies became more serious after the Sirhan family emigrated to the United States, the defense contended, until he finally was incapable of premeditated murder.

The blackout contention would support the defense argument that Sirhan had a "diminished capacity" to plan the killing and the assassination was not premeditated.

If the eight-man, four-woman jury agrees, they presumably would not order Sirhan to die in the gas chamber.

The prosecution has attempted to prove Sirhan plotted the murder. Before the state rested its case yesterday, witnesses testified they saw Sirhan practicing at a target range before the slaying and he wrote in his diary, "Kennedy must be assassinated before 5 June, 1968."