

'Running Scared,' Says Sirhan Defense

LOS ANGELES — (CDN) — Sirhan Bishara Sirhan can "thank his lucky stars if he gets off with life" for the killing of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, Sirhan's chief defense attorney said.

"Frankly, we're running scared. I didn't feel that way before, but I do now," lawyer Grant B. Cooper said.

Cooper reacted when a seven-man, five-woman jury found Sirhan guilty of first degree murder yesterday after less than 17 hours of deliberation following a 15-week trial.

Penalty Phase

"Now the problem is to save his life in the penalty phase of the trial. It's going to be rough," Cooper said.

The penalty phase begins Monday when the same jurors sit down to hear Cooper and Prosecutor John Howard argue life vs. death.

Howard said he will not demand the death penalty but he made it clear he will advise the jury it would be an appropriate verdict.

'Lack of Remorse'

"It will be explained to the jury that they have the absolute discretion between life and death," Howard said. "But I will point up Sirhan's lack of remorse and the effect a political assassination has on the democratic process."

Sirhan, an Arab zealot, shot Kennedy down in a pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles June 5 moments after the Senator had given a victory speech to a crowd of 1000 well wishers following his win over Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy in the California presidential primary.

Motive

Sirhan said he did it because Kennedy promised aid to the Israeli cause. The prosecution agreed with him. His lawyers and a parade of

psychiatric experts insist it happened because Sirhan was mentally ill and was in a drunken hypnotic trance.

"The jury took the common sense viewpoint," said chief prosecutor Lynn B. Compton.

Howard said he plans to take "only 20 minutes" to argue his case Monday and will put on no witnesses.

Cooper said he might possibly put on a witness or two — "it hasn't been decided" — but will be brief enough to send the case to the jury again either Monday night or midday Tuesday.

Sirhan Was 'Shook'

Sirhan shook Cooper's hand, smiled and thanked him at the end of the day's proceedings. But Defense Attorney Russell T. Parsons conceded Sirhan was "shook — wouldn't you be?"

Cooper said the case definitely will be appealed if the verdict is death — a review is automatic by the appellate court in any case — and probably will be if the sentence is life.

"But it's life. I think it would really be rather pointless. Sirhan can thank his lucky stars if he gets off with life," Cooper said.

The slight Palestine Arab refugee showed no emotion as Court Clerk Alice Nishikawa read off the verdict and asked each juror if it was and is your verdict?"

'Revenge' If Son Dies, Father Says

TAIYEBEH (Occupied Jordan) — (AP) — The father of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, convicted killer of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, today swore "revenge on American politicians" if his son is executed.

"The revenge won't be in words," Bishara Sirhan declared. He did not elaborate.

"I accept the fact that my son killed Sen. Kennedy," he said. "But Sen. Kennedy was to blame. He provoked my son by threatening to supply arms to the Middle East which would have caused the death of thousands, and the displacement of many more."

"My son did well."

"Many Americans have come to my house and told me they were happy to get rid of Kennedy."

Sirhan, 55, vituperatively attacked deputy prosecutor David Fitts, cursing him in Arab expletives and charging "he would not let my son defend himself."

"My son, as a true Christian like myself, is ready to work for peace, not only in words but from all his heart," said Sirhan. He said executing the youth would achieve nothing "because peace lovers will never surrender."

Mother Weeps at Verdict

PASADENA — (UPI) — Although members of Sirhan B. Sirhan's family were in court nearly every day of his 15-week trial, none was present when the verdict was read.

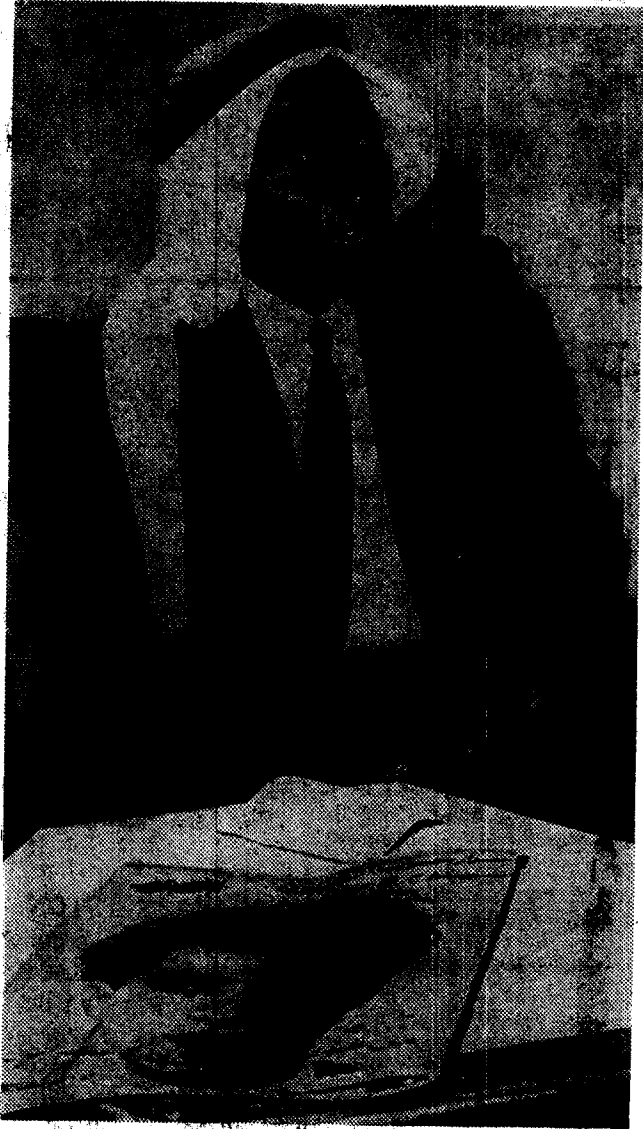
There was about 20 minutes between the time the jury signaled it had reached a verdict and the time it was read aloud by the court clerk.

"I don't think we should show up down there now, do you?" said Adel Sirhan, 30.

Instead, Adel, his brother, Munir, and their mother, Mary, gathered around a TV set and a radio in the modest family home here and awaited the news.

When they were informed Sirhan had been convicted of first degree murder, which carries a possible death penalty, all three wept.

"There is nothing more I can say," Adel said, his voice beginning to break. "We didn't expect this verdict."



IF HIS SON IS EXECUTED...
Bishara Sirhan swears revenge on U.S. "politicians"

—AP Photo

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