

# Sirhan trial before the camera

Closed-circuit coverage produces usable, but not sharp picture; audio feed is clean

For the first time in California court history, judicial proceedings of a criminal case were televised—sort of—last week. The long-delayed trial of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, accused assassin of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, began on Jan. 7 with the proceedings in the courtroom transmitted to an overflow crowd of newsmen in an auxiliary room via a closed-circuit telecast. Ironically, the trial as a news story got off to a sputtering start. Some two minutes after it opened, the participants withdrew to the judge's chambers—well out of the range of any TV camera—for an hour conference. Shortly after returning, the session was adjourned for the day.

The closed-circuit pickup of last week's proceedings (the trial was adjourned on Jan. 9 until Jan. 13) was not up to broadcast standards but still proved serviceable. The video signal newsmen saw in the auxiliary room was murky and of poor definition. It was difficult to identify individuals.

The view shown was restricted and unchanging. The wide-angle lens of the

fixed TV camera was aimed at the judge's bench from in back of the courtroom. It took in the area from the witness stand on the far right to the defendant's seat on the far left. It did not pick up the jury box which was immediately below the camera and out of range. This was in keeping with the wishes of Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker. Sirhan, because of his slight stature and his position in the far left-hand corner away from the camera, was barely noticeable. His facial expressions could not be determined. Except for a partial view of the first row behind the rail dividing the working part of the courtroom, none of the spectators, including Sirhan's mother and brother, who were present, could be seen.

Still, for newsmen in the auxiliary courtroom the proceedings easily could be followed in its essentials. The sweep of the camera took in the entire counsel table setup—defendant, three defense lawyers, two prosecution lawyers. Peering over the counsel tables, the camera faced the bench, aiming di-

rectly at the judge and also glimpsing the witness stand on the judge's left. It appeared to be enough of a view to provide a running account of the trial, though not all newsmen were happy with it.

The sound was clear and the microphones sensitive. On occasion the rustling of legal briefs and other papers obscured voices. An attorney speaking on the telephone in the courtroom just before the trial opened was clearly overheard by newsmen in the auxiliary room repeating a telephone number he promised to call as soon as the session was adjourned.

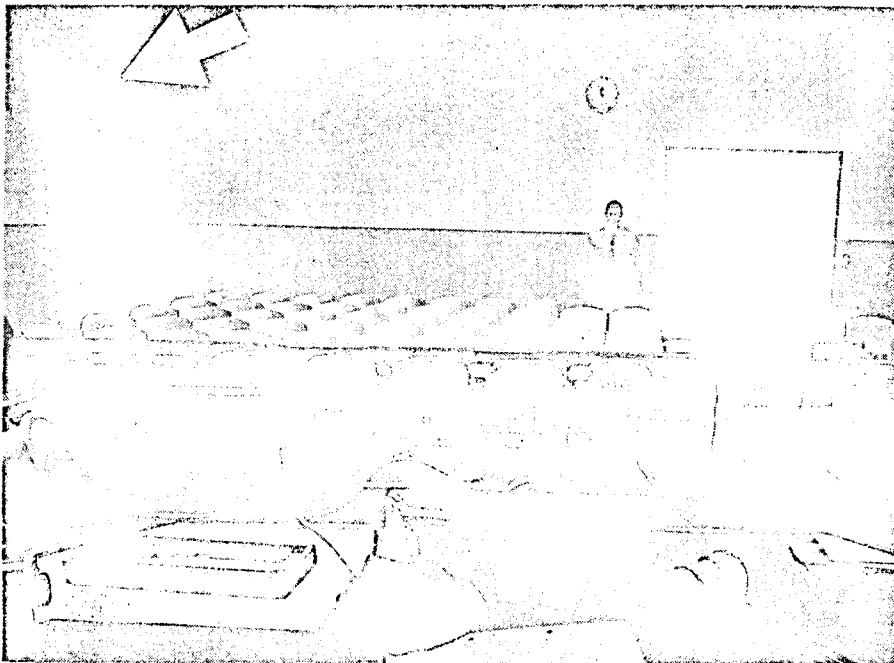
The television system uses two Norelco industrial vidicon black-and-white cameras, one in service, the other a spare. The cameras can be turned on only by the bailiff who can switch to the second camera if the first one breaks down. The cameras, nine inches long, four inches wide, six inches high and weighing about eight-and-a-half pounds each, are fitted with 16 mm. wide-angle, Angenieux Fl. 3 lenses, set at about F4. Both cameras are on loan from Norelco, with lenses borrowed from KNXT(TV) Los Angeles.

The picture is carried from the courtroom where the proceedings are taking place four floors by standard RG59U coaxial cable, strung through existing ducts.

The courtroom's existing sound system is used, with audio carried by shielded wire to speakers in the auxiliary courtroom. The speakers, manufactured by Dukane and backed by a Stromberg-Carlson model AU-57, 150-w, 50-60 cycles amplifier, are mounted under each of three Conrac black-and-white 27-inch studio monitors. The monitors, on loan from and maintained by KABC-TV Los Angeles, are mounted on shelves on the wall of the auxiliary courtroom. Unlike the cameras, which are solid state, the monitors take time to warm and so the plan is to keep them on throughout the trial, for as long as three continuous months. The hope is that this procedure will avoid alignment problems.

There was never any official plan to tape or broadcast the trial. Rule 980 of the Judicial Council of California specifically prohibits broadcasts of court proceedings and also forbids television camera crews or newspaper photographers from taking film or pictures in the courtroom while a trial is in progress. The closed-circuit system is intended solely to extend the courtroom to a greater number of newsmen than could be accommodated in the courtroom itself.

Between 35 and 40 seats are available for news media in the courtroom on the eighth floor of the Los Angeles Hall of Justice. Some 75 additional newsmen can watch the closed-circuit



(Los Angeles Times photo)

Two Norelco industrial vidicon black-and-white cameras are hidden in the box (indicated by arrow) above the steel-plated window in the left-hand corner of the Los Angeles courtroom where Sirhan Bishara Sirhan went on trial last week for the murder of Robert F. Kennedy. The box, where the cameras are mounted one over the other, used to house an air conditioning

unit.

Sound is picked up from microphones on the table serving prosecution and defense attorneys and on the bench where Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker presides. Camera's view, for the closed-circuit telecast, does not include the jury box or more than the first row of spectators.

telecast in the courtroom annex four floors below.

TV cameramen and newspaper photographers last week were able to work in the corridors outside the courtrooms on both floors. On-camera interviews with attorneys (Sirhan was seen but not heard) were arranged on a pooled basis. But even in the auxiliary courtroom, no typewriters, cameras, recording equipment, or any other electronic equipment were permitted. Also forbidden was tapping of the closed-circuit cable or use of any type of film or video tape.

Tight security precautions for newsmen were maintained on both floors. Newsmen were asked to remove their jackets, empty pockets, were searched from head to toe by a bailiff and checked by a metal detector. Once inside, they were not permitted to leave the security area surrounding the courtroom until the court session adjourned.

News media from all over the world are represented at the trial. Among the broadcast stations covering are KFI, KFWB, KHJ-AM-TV, KMPC, KNX, KABC-AM-TV, KNBC(TV), KNXT(TV), KTTV(TV), KTLA(TV), all Los Angeles. All U. S. radio and television networks are represented. There are also newsmen representing France, Italy, Switzerland, Mexico, Scandinavia, the Jewish Press, England, Australia, Japan, Germany and countries of the Middle East.

Newsmen covering via closed-circuit television resented not being in the courtroom where the proceedings were actually taking place. Some griped about the quality of the TV picture.

The California Freedom of Information Committee, representing all news media, is hoping that the system being used for the Sirhan trial will set a precedent for coverage of important trials throughout the country, where courtroom accommodations are limited. Sums up a California newsmen: "We're hoping by our efforts with the Sirhan trial to change the attitude of some courts and the bar to use of cameras in the courts throughout the country."

### High cost of gladiators

In what appeared to be quick decision and scheduling in time for the start of the mid-season, ABC-TV purchased network rights to "Spartacus" last Wednesday (Jan. 8). The network said it would show the color feature in two parts on its movie nights the first week of February (Wednesday, Feb. 5, and Sunday, Feb. 9).

The feature, originally released by Universal to theaters in October 1960, was purchased from MCA-TV for three runs on the network at a reported cost of \$1.8 million. ABC will show the film in the 9-11 p.m. period on both movie nights.

## Harris poll quizzes U.S. on TV violence

### Results will be given violence commission in February report

An extensive survey of public attitudes toward television and violence has been completed by Louis Harris & Associates and will be a major part of a report by the President's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

Some 50 detailed questions were asked of 1,600 Americans last October in interviews lasting an hour each. Many of them dealt with the respondents' use and judgment of television. The results are expected to be presented to the commission next month by its mass-media task force.

The violence commission, appointed by President Johnson last June following the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, has until June 10 to submit its final report. A preliminary account is being submitted to the President this week.

The questionnaire, which takes up 30 legal-size pages, was constructed by the Harris organization in conjunction with both the mass-media and the assassination task forces of the commission. The polling was done Oct. 1-8, 1968, among a sample of 1,200 adults (18 and over) and 400 juveniles. The youngsters were asked only those questions dealing with mass media; the adults were asked other questions dealing with social attitudes as well as social and economic status.

It is believed that the Harris company charged only about half of the normal fee for the work. Commercially, it is understood, the poll would have cost more than \$50,000.

One part of the questionnaire used by Harris interviewers started with the statement: "Now I would like to get your judgment on some questions concerning the possible effects of television violence." Respondents were then asked to give one of these answers—"likely," "possible," "unlikely" or "not sure"—to each of the six parts of this question: "How likely is it that TV violence (1) plays a part in making America a violent society; (2) allows viewers to blow off steam by watching violence, thus decreasing the likelihood of their being violent; (3) makes people insensitive to real acts of violence that they hear about or see; (4) provides entertainment and relaxation without harmful or bad effects; (5) triggers violent acts from people who are maladjusted or mentally unstable; (6) supports and strengthens traditional American values."

Among other questions in the poll:

▪ Which one of the major forms of

mass communications do you use most frequently to get the news?

▪ Which medium seems to emphasize news about crime and delinquency the most?

▪ In your judgment which one tends to emphasize the use of guns, knives or other instruments of violence?

▪ Imagine . . . that you had the power to eliminate one television program from the air of all last year's or this year's programs. Which one would you eliminate?

▪ Of the three major television networks—ABC, NBC, CBS—do you detect any difference in the amount of violence they portray in their entertainment programs? How would you rank them from most to least violent?

▪ How do you feel about the amount of violence portrayed in television programs today, not including news programs—do you think there is too much, a reasonable amount, or very little violence?

▪ Apart from the amount of violence, do you generally approve or disapprove of the kind of violence that is portrayed on TV?

The remainder of the questions related to attitudes toward hypothetical and real-life situations and asked for socio-economic answers about the respondents and their families.

### 'Playboy' grows like Topsy in television

HMH TV Inc., Chicago, owned by *Playboy* magazine publisher Hugh M. Hefner and producer-director David Sontag, plans to expand into television specials, and possibly motion pictures, as a sequel to its one-hour syndicated series, *Playboy After Dark*, which begins on the air this month in major markets.

Mr. Sontag, who is executive producer of the new weekly series, reported in an interview in New York last week that he and Mr. Hefner are envisioning at least two, and as many as four, one-hour specials a year. Their program concepts, he said, will be derived from material published in *Playboy* magazine. "We are considering several motion-picture projects, but we probably won't take them up until later this year as we're deep into our TV series," he said.

Mr. Sontag, who has been in TV production for 15 years with both NBC-TV and ABC-TV, noted that 22 segments of the *Playboy* series have been completed in Hollywood. The series, which had begun in a few small markets, will debut in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas, and Philadelphia shortly. Screen Gems Inc., the distributor, has placed the series in 14 markets to date.