

Sirhan defense team / appellate attorney 9/4/60

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THE SIRHAN DEFENSE TEAM

According to the newspapers, **Russell Parsons** was the first attorney named to defend **Sirhan Sirhan**. In fact, the first lawyer picked was **Grant Cooper**, the most prominent criminal lawyer in California. **Cooper** was personally chosen by **A.L. Wirin**, chief counsel for the **American Civil Liberties Union** in Los Angeles. Wirin had been in constant contact with the young Jordanian immigrant immediately following the assassination of **Robert Kennedy**, his avowed purpose to protect the suspect's constitutional rights and gain him a fair trial. Wirin seemed uneasy in the role, and clearly did not want to represent Sirhan. So the name of **Grant Cooper** was agreed upon between Sirhan and Wirin. According to his notebooks, Sirhan was fascinated with criminal cases, particularly the murder trial of a deputy district attorney who was convicted of killing his wife and her lover. So the name of **Grant Cooper** was well known to Sirhan. But Cooper's name would not be made public for awhile. He was tied up in United States District Court, representing a defendant in the **Friars Club** cheating scandal. * And it was agreed that should Cooper's name be linked publicly with Sirhan, it might jeopardize his case in federal court. So someone, it's not known exactly whom, provided the names of several other lawyers who could possibly handle the case until Cooper was available. The list was taken to Sirhan Sirhan at his jail cell, and almost without hesitation he looked at the six or seven names available and selected **Russell Parsons**. Parsons was not as well known to the public as **Grant Cooper**. But in legal circles, at one time, his name was almost a legend.

It was after Cooper ^(Horn) secretly agreed to head Sirhan defense team that Cooper acquired those forbidden Grand Jury transcripts in **Trial's** case — 265

Those well acquainted with Parsons said he had a deep hatred for Robert Kennedy. The hatred dated back to the time Kennedy was a counsel for the Senate Rackets Committee which had been looking into Parsons' connections with the underworld.

Almost immediately after Parsons was named counsel for Sirhan, he created a furor in an interview that was covered by every television station and newspaper in Los Angeles. Parsons said Sirhan was getting mail from people "who thought he had done a good thing."

Despite that remark, Russell Parsons' legal qualifications were in outstanding order although his age, about 70, hardly made him a candidate for a gruelling criminal trial that would be the most publicized in American history. There was speculation that Parsons had been selected because the prosecution had an ironclad case and he would be the ideal choice to appeal the verdict. Parsons was an expert in the field of evidence. He was the author of the appeal that led to the famous Cahan decision by the U.S. Supreme Court which laid down new ground rules governing the use of evidence by police and the prosecution. He was also the author of another appeal that turned into a landmark case, the Caruso decision.

When Parsons took the Sirhan case his legal credentials were well publicized, but past and present connections were overlooked. The connection with former policeman Michael McCowan was a matter of public record. And soon McCowan would be at Parsons' side in the role of chief investigator.

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In the early 1940s, in his role as a deputy district attorney, Parsons was one of three prosecutors assigned a licensing scandal involving former California liquor czar **William G. Bonelli**. Bonelli (who eventually fled to Mexico) began playing rough when he learned Parsons was on the case. Parsons was first accused of falsifying his civil service application by stating he had never been arrested. It was brought out that as a young man in 1928 Parsons was named three times in felony complaints that charged him with issuing bad checks. The previous year, in San Bernardino County, Parsons reportedly made good on a number of checks bounced by the bank. All of the checks were for small amounts of money.

Still again, in 1927, Parsons pleaded guilty to obtaining property under false pretenses in a Whittier Justice Court and was given a six-month suspended sentence. Responding to the charges, Parsons admitted he had been financially embarrassed in 1927 and 1928. He said the transactions resulted from an oil company he managed which ran into financial trouble. The ^{old} charges against Parsons were made public by a Los Angeles civic leader named **Clifford E. Clinton**, leader of a political organization named CIVIC. Clinton was a bitter political foe of the district attorney at that time, **Burton Pitts**. Parsons had Pitts' support all the way. Parsons managed to stay on the case and county officials refused to take action against him despite the false statement in his job application.

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In the late 1940s, Parsons went into private practice. One of his major cases involved the defense in 1949 of a number of high-ranking Los Angeles policemen who had been indicted by the grand jury on corruption charges. The word started spreading that Parsons could be counted on when a cop was in trouble. Then, too, there were rumbles that Parsons was a mouthpiece for the "mob."

In 1950, the reform mayor of Los Angeles, Fletcher Bowron, finally crumbled under too much political crossfire from his old enemy, the Los Angeles Times, and was singled out for a recall election. Among those who decided to oppose Bowron was attorney Russell Parsons. The rumbles of mob connections grew louder and finally the Bowron forces unveiled their most important piece of evidence to make the point, a letter Parsons had written in December 1944 to the chief county probation officer in Cleveland, Ohio. In that letter Parsons asked that probation be lifted in Ohio on ^{Mickey Cohen} ~~Sammy Cohen~~, the small time hood who made good as the number one mobster on the West Coast after he moved to Los Angeles. Mickey Cohen's name was a legend in 1950. Besides beating up other hoods who picked on little old ladies, Cohen managed to survive assassination attempts; keep control of a flourishing bookmaking industry, and enforce what had to be enforced in the circles of the underworld. So Parsons' letter on Cohen's behalf came as a mild surprise, particularly that part in which he wrote about Cohen's "rehabilitation."

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Parsons

RUSSELL E. PARSONS
ATTORNEY AT LAW
SUITE 400 METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT BLDG
300 WEST THIRD STREET
LOS ANGELES 10, CALIFORNIA
MAY 1933



December 18, 1944

Mr. William Dillon
Chief Probation Officer
Cuyahugo County
Cleveland, Ohio

In re **Melkie Cohen**

My dear Sir:

Please be advised that I have known Mr. Cohen for four or five years and am also acquainted with a number of substantial people here in the community with whom he is acquainted and associates. I understand that he is desirous of terminating his probation proceedings and I am sure that his conduct here indicates that he has rehabilitated himself. Anything you can do for him will be much appreciated.

Very truly yours,


RUSSELL E. PARSONS

REP:sk

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asked to comment about the letter, Parsons said he could not recall writing it. But he did recall that Cohen had gotten into some kind of trouble in Cleveland once upon a time. (The records in Cleveland showed that Cohen and one of his followers, Frank Niccoli, had been convicted of embezzlement in Cleveland in 1949. Parsons emphatically denied that Cohen was a contributor to his campaign. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I'm not very friendly with Cohen at the moment." It was the contention of the Bowron forces that the recall election was financed by the underworld. Parsons made a poor showing and that ended his career in politics.

Among Parsons' more famous clients was a local Mafia kinpin, Joe Sica. Defending Sica on charges of conspiracy and extortion in a case in which the underworld was accused of trying to muscle in and take control of welterweight boxing champion Don Jordan. Parsons described his client as "a neighbor who stuck his nose in a family affair and got hurt."

As a criminal attorney, Parsons was bound to associate with many shady characters. But, the fact is the Parsons' record is one of contradictions. One of the great problems during the trial of Sirhan Sirhan and the days leading up to it was that of security. Supposedly every person who came in contact with Sirhan was of unimpeachable character. Yet, at Parsons' personal direction, the man closest to Sirhan, the one who was constantly at his side, was a convicted felon, former policeman Michael McCowan.

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Under the law, because of his felony record, McCowan was not entitled to take the state bar examination and qualify as an attorney. Yet when there was a private conference in the chambers of trial judge Herbert V. Walker involving **Sirhan**, McCowan was always present.

The group that gathered in chambers also consisted of defense attorney *Emile Zola Berman* ~~Emile Zola Berman~~ of New York, a man of great distinction in Eastern legal circles who happened to be Jewish, and **Grant Cooper**. That case in federal court involving the **Friars Club** cheating scandal had turned into a nightmare for Cooper. His client had lost, and now a federal grand jury was investigating Cooper and other attorneys in the case because a copy of the secret indictment had made its way into the courtroom -- specifically, on the counsel table of Grant Cooper. Still another attorney frequently made his presence felt in the chambers of Judge Walker, a man whose interest in the case, on the surface, was much greater than that of the other members of the defense team. His name: **Issa Nakhleh**.

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From RAC. 6/3/71

CONFIDENTIAL

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1. Attorney Luke McKussack represents
Lishon - Lishon on the death sentence
appeal. McKussack personally wrote
the gigantic defense brief.

2. Luke McKussack has, until most
recently, been attorney of record for Elmer
Pratt and the local Black Panther Party.

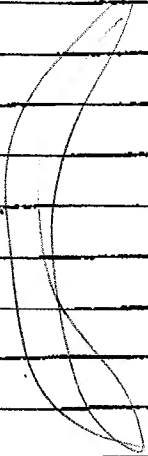
3. He continues to visit Pratt in jail.
Sometimes he is accompanied by Shirley
Southland. According to a confidential
source (as far as Pratt to be reliable), McKussack
and friends are actively participating in some
Panther (Pratt faction) criminal plots.

4. Elmer Pratt was secretly indicted by the
Grand Jury late last November for the
1968 "Tennis court" murder in Santa
Monica. D. Wolfe of LAPD was the expert
witness who connected empty shell
casings found at the shooting scene with
a .45 automatic found near Pratt at
the time of Pratt's arrest on Jan. 17, 1969
following the US shooting at U.C.L.A.

Pratt was a fugitive at the time of
the indictment. Following extradition from
Dallas Texas in early February of this
year, Pratt was arraigned on 2/23/71
on the murder. McKussack appeared
in court on that date and received a

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copy of the grand jury transcript.



5. Approximately three months ago we received confidential information (same source) that McKissack had personally assured Pratt: a) that he (McKissack) would again step into the case and handle Pratt's defense sometime in the future (thus replacing his court-appointed counsel Chas. Mulgater) and b) that he would beat the case on "ballistics"

6. Until last week, the Black Panther party had an operative working within the County Clerk's office here in the central district - a male Negro by the name of DASHLE HART. Hart is now under suspension due to a pending bribery charge against him and others in the People v. Silvestro case.

7. Between approximately March - May, 1971 five large notebooks containing important documentary evidence in the so-called "LA 18" Panther case "disappeared" from the custody of the County Clerk's office. Ron Caspell of our office and the court appointed private investigator for the defense were told by the Clerk's office that said exhibits could not be found.

8. Approximately two ^{days} after Hart was transfered to the Civil Division from the Criminal section, the notebooks "mysteriously" reappeared. (See Larpel and P. J. Talmadge for details). We have not yet responded to the exhibits to determine whether or not they have been tampered with.

9. on 6/1/71 (last Tuesday) Hart showed up as a spectator on the first day of jury selection. ^(CAH "11" case) He tried to get past the security check by flashing his clerk's I.D. card which was recognized by someone and had his credentials taken away from him. He still attended the proceedings for some period however. Hart was showing up at prison for the trials, while still in the clerk's office, and exchanged Black-power salutes with Pratt.

~~10. Several sources of information have come to our attention~~

10. Over the past few months we have received information from several sources which describe criminal conduct on the part of Luke Wood Kinski. Dick Muth is aware of the various circumstances and sources. He can personally fill you in.

