

Arab-Americans Demand Release

Sirhan Has Become Mideast Folk Hero

SACRAMENTO (AP) — An Arab-American group says Sirhan Sirhan, the convicted killer of Robert F. Kennedy, is "a hero to the people of the Middle East" and should be released.

The president of the New York-based American-Arab Relations Committee, M.T. Mehdi, told a news conference Tuesday that Sirhan, 25, is a "political prisoner." He said Sirhan, a Jordanian, would travel to the Middle East where Iraq, Libya and Jordan would "welcome him with open arms."

The Arabs hold Sirhan in high esteem because he killed Kennedy, a proponent of military aid to Israel. Mehdi said that he added that Sirhan is "reminded about his Kennedy's family."

Describing his group, Mehdi said its goal is to promote Arab-American understanding. He said the group consists of 6,000 dues-paying members, gets no money from any government, and supported President Carter during the last election.

He said he would ask California's Board of Prisoners to hold a special hearing as early as January to consider Sirhan's release. He has already been turned down three times, the last time Monday. The board's executive officer, Robin Decker, said it "almost never" holds a special hearing.



M.T. Mehdi

tember 1964 date "could even be reduced a couple of months."

Los Angeles, "has paid for his crime," Mehdi said. "Life in prison in California really means only seven years with parole," he said.

California at Berkeley, said he will meet Sirhan on Thursday in isolated prison to discuss strategy for his release.

December said that in 1975, officials set a March 1980 parole date, "but that was moved up in ensuing years because of time off for good behavior."

Sirhan's case is reviewed annually. His next hearing will be in July, December said.

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ing Sun

Sammy Thomas, 1, seems to enjoy
sun of 90 degrees Tuesday in
the all-time heat the previous
set in 1941. The present heat wave is
for the next couple of days.

Postal Rules Don't Supersede Law, Court Rules

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Postal regulations do not supersede the federal Freedom of Information Act, a federal appeals court says in a case involving the Church of Scientology.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Tuesday sent the case back to a lower court.

The U.S. Postal Service released many documents to the church but, citing its own rules, withheld others compiled during investigation of possible criminal offenses. The church sued to compel disclosure.

Postal regulation governing its own investigator files do not take precedence over FOI Act exemption provisions, the appellate court held.

Federal freedom-of-information laws contain some exemptions for various federal agencies, including the Postal Service.

The appeals court Tuesday sent the case back to U.S. District Court in Los Angeles with orders to determine if the information requested by the church could remain confidential under the exemptions listed in the FOI Act.

The appeals court also said the lower court should determine if the Postal Service had failed to provide sufficient evidence to support its action in keeping the files confidential under its own regulations.

The lower court found the files had been compiled for law-enforcement purposes and ruled them exempt from disclosure.

The appeals court said the Postal Service apparently concedes its exemption rule fails to meet requirements of the FOI exemption. This, it said, is because the rule gives the agency complete discretion to grant or withhold investigatory files by providing that no disclosure is required in certain cases.

In discussing whether the Congress intended to exempt the Postal Service investigatory files from freedom-of-information laws, the appeals court said it did not find lawmakers "appreciated the dangers inherent in disclosing investigatory files."

It noted that in amending the FOI exemption, Congress made strong statements "about the hazards of agencies withholding any information thrust into an investigatory file."