



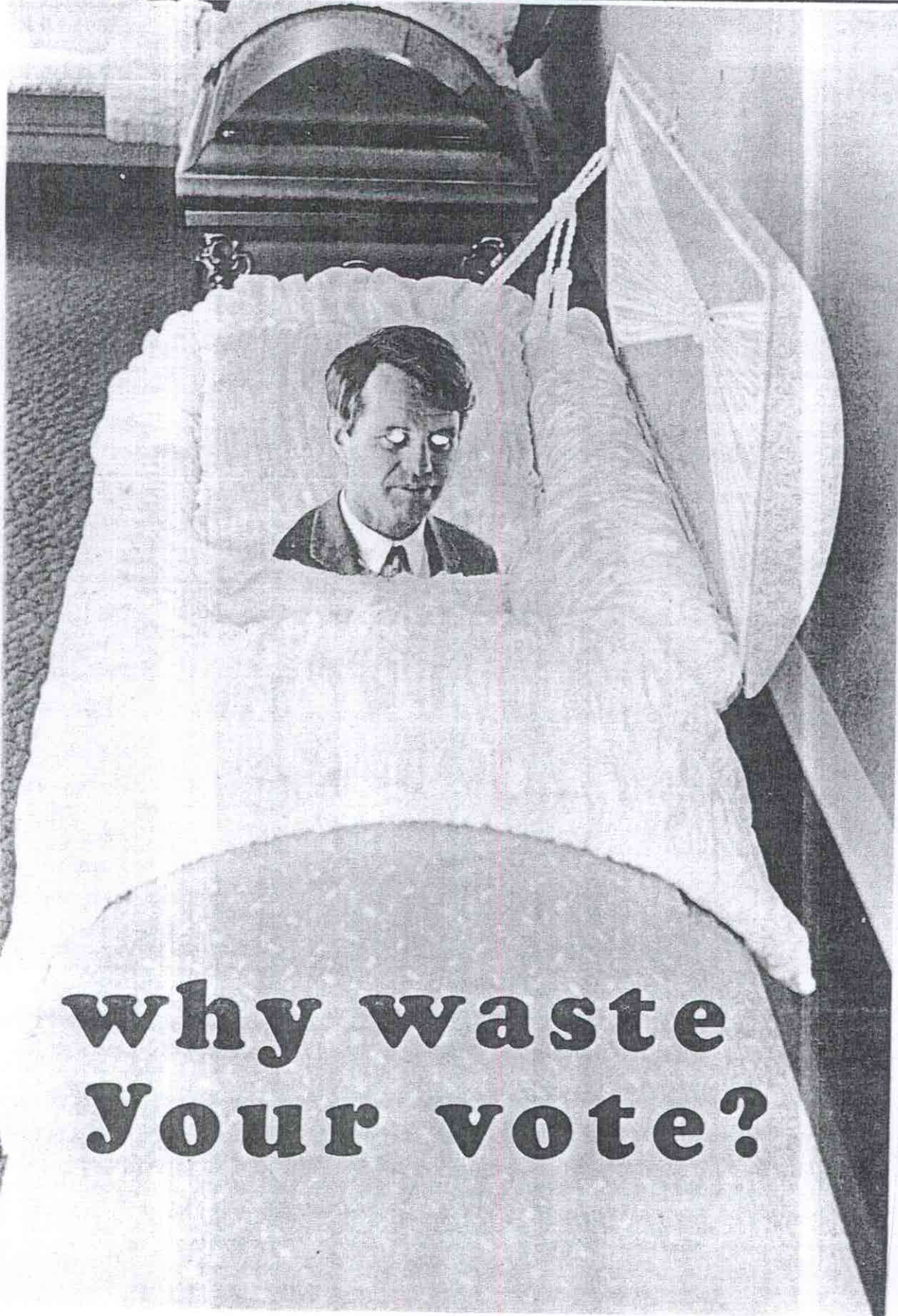
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**why waste
your vote?**

MARVIN GARSON

Saturday night I went to Robert Kennedy's \$100 a plate fundraising dinner at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel. The benign ghost of President Warren G. Harding, who dies in the Palace in 1923 (poisoned by his wife) historians (suspect) made a brief appearance at the bar before the dinner began. I was the only one who noticed him.

"Why, Mr. Harding," I said. "I'm so pleased to meet you. I just finished telling my host that your administration was the model of how the presidency ought to be run."

"Have a drink, son." We drank, and I laid a joint on him:

"Thanks a lot, son. Hard to find around here. Mexican girl—cutest little piece of ass you ever saw—used to bring a bunch of reeferers whenever she came visiting the White House. But I ain't been able to find any of this stuff since the time all the kids and the colored came in here to the Palace to lay around and sing songs. When was that—'62, '63? Been pretty dull around here these last five years."

"What do you think about Kennedy?" I asked.

"I don't see throwing away your vote on a dead man. They're gonna kill him—and anyway, there ain't much there to kill. I'm a lot more alive than he is."

I rejoined my hosts for dinner. They were political novices who had become active in the Kennedy campaign, helped organize the dinner, and wanted to use their complimentary tickets in "bridging the communications gap." Several times they had to rescue me from ushers and police who did not believe I had a ticket.

I was gracious at the dinner table; despite my Peace and Freedom Party button (which many guests took as a deliberate insult), I did not heckle or jeer. In fact, when Senator Kennedy made his entrance, I squealed: "Oh, he's gorgeous!" although he wasn't.

At a sizable distance, or in a photograph, he looks beautiful, but closer up he is a wax doll, pink flesh melting under the lights, hair of an entirely indeterminate color (gray? brown? sandy blond? it was as if his designers had not yet made up their minds and were flipping through a set of color overlays)

It was a good speech. The jokes weren't very funny (which hardly mattered—the audience was ready to laugh for any mention of Teddy or Ethel); but the serious part of it sounded very sincere indeed.

Do you want a political analysis? The rhetoric was New Left, the program was Eisenhowerian. "People have to participate in the decisions that affect their

lives"; "we must return government to the people." He talked against poverty and also against centralized federal bureaucracy. What would he do? It came down to this: tax incentives to encourage businesses to set up operations in poverty areas.

"He's talking your talk", I said to another guest, a Rockefeller Republican from Denver (also invited, presumably, to bridge the communications gap).

"Yes," he said, "very good. But why wasn't that done in the first Kennedy administration?"

"Wasn't it?" I asked. "Hmm, guess not."

The speech finished, people crowded around the Senator to get his autograph,

thrusting books and bumper stickers and all kinds of scraps of paper at him. I happened to have with me an Express Times with Jeff Blankfort's classic photo on the cover, the naked man entirely unnoticed in the crowd at the Civic Center rally April 27. I conceived the idea of having the Senator autograph it.

It took a good twenty minutes to worm my way through, but finally I was face to face (or face to mask, rather) with the Senator.

"May I have your autograph, Senator?"

I smiled. He took the paper tentatively with one hand, beginning to make preliminary signature motions with the other; blinked; focused on the picture; and then gave me a look of pure hatred and disgust, like a man opening his refrigerator and finding a giant spider there. He made a motion with his hand as if to squash me.

On the way out, unautographed newspaper under my arm, I ran into President Harding again. "Buy a paper, sir?" and held it up. He looked at the picture, chuckled, and pulled a quarter from his pocket. I fumbled for change, taking my time. He winked to let me know he was hip to my hustle. "Keep the change, son," he said.