

Portland, Ore.: Kennedy's Western Invasion

By JAMES RESTON

PORTLAND, Ore., Oct. 25 — Robert Kennedy is rising and changing faster than any other political figure in the nation today. He is turning the legend he inherited from his brother into a powerful political movement, and he is coming out of the 1966 elections a winner, regardless of what happens to the Democratic or Republican party.

Even his famous brother at age forty, though only three years from the Presidency, never created the stir or drew the crowds outside his own state Bobby has been getting in the present tour through the West. The Labor Temple here in Portland was so jammed last night that even the Senator's aides and the crowd of reporters following him by jet across the country couldn't get into the hall.

The Publicity Advantage

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer gave him three whole columns on the front page this morning (Bobby! Demos Beam as Students Scream), and the Oregonian here in Portland led the paper with a headline (Youths Mob Bob Kennedy) that overwhelmed the news out of the Manila conference.

This is no longer the stunned young man who walked through the political crowds in a trance two years ago and sounded uncertain and squeaky in his political talks. He is turning into an accomplished public speaker, and he is not only wooing the young jumpers and squealers, but putting a lot of influential Democratic candidates in his debt.

His platform manner is a faithful copy of his brother's. In these last few weeks the reporters following him feel he has improved substantially.

The Kennedy Jokes

He starts each political talk with the same kind of self-mocking wit, quiet, brief and conversational. He says he is glad to see such a big crowd, but as Churchill remarked, the crowd would have been twice as large for a hanging. Noting the youngsters, he jokes about wanting the voting age lowered to fifteen. Observing that the President, the Vice President and the Congress are all out of Washington, he says he has just had a wire from his brother Teddy: "Everybody's gone: Have just seized control."

Much of this is carefully contrived, but he is quick and deft at turning aside hostile ques-

tions with a jibe or a wise-crack, and he seems increasingly bold and self-confident.

He didn't hesitate to tell the students in Washington and Oregon that he didn't like the present student deferment system under Selective Service. Nor did he hesitate to make clear that he opposed the hawkish Vietnam policy of the Democratic candidate for the Senate in Oregon, Representative Robert B. Duncan, though he came here primarily to support the Democratic candidates for the House and Senate.

This, however, is not so much a trip to expound Kennedy's policies as it is to exploit Kennedy's personality, gain publicity, and win influential supporters in the Democratic ranks. He remains ambiguous about Vietnam, but the main impression he leaves is that he is for peace, for composing differences with the Soviet and the Chinese, for escalating the war on poverty rather than the war in Vietnam, and always, while saying an occasional good word for President Johnson, he talks about his brother and takes up a position a little to the left of Mr. Johnson's policies both at home and abroad.

Nineteen-sixty-six, then, is obviously a training ground for

a Kennedy Presidential bid in the future, but here the parallel with his brother breaks down. In the off-year elections of 1958, when John F. Kennedy began his campaign for the White House, the Republicans were in charge of the Government, and the field was clear for all Democrats, with Adlai Stevenson hesitating to run and Lyndon Johnson carrying the burden of liberal Northern opposition.

Kennedy's Problems

Robert Kennedy is not so fortunate. Actually he has more executive experience at forty as Attorney General and first assistant to President Kennedy than J.F.K. ever had until he reached the White House. But Bobby has Johnson in his way, which is quite a barrier; and he will be 46 in 1972 and could easily be a grandfather by that time, which might make a difference to the students whose votes he is trying to get.

Nevertheless, his progress is significant. He is growing in experience and in poise. He is benefiting from the popularity of his brother and the personal unpopularity among many young people of President Johnson, and this is enough to keep alive the Kennedy mystique.