

Eye on Democrats by Anita Gallagher

PBS's own Sports Sunday: the Dartmouth debate

After all these years, the highbrow Public Broadcasting System, which frowns on any television program not made in London or Moscow, has finally bowed to popular demand. Maybe it's because PBS is starved for cash.

In any case, on Jan. 15 PBS finally went into competition with the networks and inaugurated Sports Sunday. The commercial networks have the Rose Bowl, the Orange Bowl, the Super Bowl. PBS had the Toilet Bowl. And when it was all over, each of the participants was flushed with victory.

It was called the Dartmouth debate. It featured eight candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination—every announced Democrat except Lyndon H. LaRouche, who was excluded from the proceedings by the anti-democratic Manatt-Mondale combination.

Running for three hours, it was the occasion of one of the few cogent remarks ever made by ABC's Ted Koppel. Moderating the first half, Koppel quipped that at the outset, 3 p.m. on the nose, they probably drew the largest viewing audience of any broadcast in PBS history, and by 3:15 p.m. they probably had the smallest.

Politically, the most striking thing was that every man jack of them fell all over himself to sound more-arms-control-than-thou, more-appeasement-than-thou.

Alan Cranston has made the nuclear freeze his *raison d'être*. He wants to do it the day after he's inaugurated

President, he said. Awkwardly for him (as George McGovern pointed out), although he's 100 percent for the freeze, he backs the B-1 bomber. (It's made in California.) So Cranston's formulation was a little feeble: "I support the B-1, but I support the freeze and the freeze would stop the B-1."

Poor old John Glenn, who's been telling anyone that would listen that he is the author of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act and that he's as good a freezer as the next man, said it again. Jesse Jackson (for a Libyan patsy, he gave a pretty smooth performance, by the way) tried to explain why the world would be so much better if only President Reagan would meet with the Syrian president, Soviet proxy, and terrorist controller Hafez al-Assad.

Mondale reminisced about sitting in on the "Camp David process," and how well *that* worked. A brave man, Mondale, even mentioning the Carter era.

The debate opened with an absurd interchange on The Woman Question. Everyone rushed into the breach to register his absolute commitment to the importance of A Woman On the Ticket. No one asked the only sensible question: "Which woman?" George McGovern got in the best line: "I don't know who my running mate will be, but I just want to make one pledge: This time I'm going to be careful."

The baloney vs. gobbledygook exchange

Under the tender touch of Phil Donahue, who moderated the second half of the debate, the Mondale-Glenn dogfight broke into the open. First Mondale declared his intention to "scale the defense budget to reality"; "impose a very strong program of health care controls"; "bring those [agriculture budget] costs down dramatically"; "restore revenues"; "add something—in terms of education and

science"; "reduce the Reagan deficits by more than half."

Glenn erupted: "Let me point out that it's the same vague gobbledygook of nothing we've been hearing all through this campaign. Let's just get rid of it. . . . Is this going to be a Democratic Party that promises everything to everybody and runs up a \$170 billion a year?! . . . Let me finish! . . . I'm disgusted and tired of all the vague promises. I wish that the former Vice-President would in fact get some figures down. . . ."

Mondale cuts in: "It's because you voted for Reaganomics."

Glenn: "Twenty-one percent interest rates. . . ."

Mondale: "Who has the floor here?"

Glenn: "Seventeen percent inflation rate, and that's why we lost the White House, and it's why. . . ."

Mondale: "Wait a minute now. Mr. Donahue, may I have your. . . . There's just been about a six-minute speech—all of it baloney. . . . Mr. Glenn voted to create these \$200 billion deficits that we're suffering from. . . . By voodoo—now wait a minute now—by voodoo numbers. . . . Those are baloney figures. My position is responsible and we're doing just fine."

Heaven knows *that's* not true. Reubin Askew had a point: "What I'd like to say is you're both right. They're both right in what they say about each other."

Capturing the flavor of the whole shebang is a wisecrack from Ernest Hollings, who went after Reubin Askew when the latter, who is afflicted with a nervous facial tic, tried to get the floor. Said Hollings: "What's the matter, Reubin? You have a tic in your ear, too?"

That pretty well expresses the unity of these Democratic candidates, their manners, and their morality.

The whole debate was like that, only more boring.