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# Too many open microphones

**EDITORIAL**

MONDAY NIGHT'S LEADERS' DEBATE may well go down in history as the worst ever, at least in modern times.

As many observers have pointed out, there were too many leaders, who likely all felt short-changed by the format.

There was also a curious poitioning of the six, with Green Party leader Elizabeth May and NDP leader Jagmeet Sing at opposite ends and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau and Conservative leader Andrew Scheer next to one another, allowing them to engage in shouting matches.

In a Globe and Mail opinion piece Tuesday, Steve Patterson, host of The Debaters on CBC Radio One and The Debaters Live touring show, found it ?the most ridiculous debate that our democracy has ever staged. And I say this having moderated more than 700 debates that were intentionally ridiculous.?

He said there were at least two leaders who shouldn't have been there, Maxime Bernier and Yves-François Blanchet ? ?the former because he is a fearmonger who espouses xenophobic policies and broke off from the Conservative Party because he thinks Andrew Scheer is a Liberal ? perhaps the least disturbing of his misconceptions ? and the latter because his entire mandate is to pursue the interests of one province.?

And while applauding the ?unprecedented all-female journalist lineup of debate moderators,? there were also too many of them.

Then there was the unusual audience setup, with one-third on the stage behind the leaders, and the other two-thirds behind the party leaders' backs. ?The end result: an awkward staring contest between the ?stage people' and the ?behind-the-back people,' with each one wondering who would blink first and what the hell was happening. They had also been specifically instructed not to make any noise or, apparently, show any signs of life.?

And then there was the matter of the questions put tothe leaders. ?It's always difficult to determine exactly what questions to ask of leaders. Apparently 8,000 questions were submitted by Canadians, which were then divided into five categories. Yet none of the ones selected really touched on foreign policy, and the section on Indigenous issues was quickly hijacked, becoming exclusively about pipelines ? a further indignity to the issues. Meanwhile, the best question of the night, about the climate crisis, came from a man who was watching from the Halifax library. Which begs the question: If you're going to go to everyday Canadians for questions anyway, why have any moderators at all??

In the end, there was ?not enough of the one thing debate viewers are looking for: a clear idea of the grasp of issues of each leader. A ridiculous idea on paper was turned even more ridiculous by its execution.?

One thing not mentioned in the opinion piece was what we see as the chaos caused by having six open microphones, a choice that opened the door to shouting matches, which occurred regularly between Messrs. Trudeau and Scheer and often made it impossible to understand what either was saying.

As we see it, each leader ought to have worn a small mic that would be turned on only when he or she ?had the floor.?

In the end, we doubt that the debate changed anyone's mind and may actually have led some viewers to conclude that they wouldn't vote for anyone.

If there were any winners, they might have been Ms. May and Mr. Singh, who were relatively calm in addressing the issues and might be seen as expecting this election race to end in a dead heat, giving them an ability to keep a resultant minority government

from taking any actions they would oppose.

And with the Liberals and Conservatives both unable to govern without help from the NDP and Green caucuses, there might even be the possibility of Canada having its first coalition government, with Green and/or NDP MPs having seats at the cabinet table.

That possibility might also open the doors for the new government to adopt some of the policies being advanced by the two parties, which recent polls show having support from about one-quarter of the electorate.

In the circumstances, it will be interesting to monitor the polling between now and Oct. 21.