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LETTERS

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A debate not worth having

The exclusion of Green Party Leader Elizabeth May from the televised national leaders' debate raises two important questions: what are reasonable criteria for including/excluding political parties; and what purpose is served by these "debates"?

Should the criterion be: a) having sitting members of Parliament (as the broadcast consortium argues)? b) having some threshold of public support (i.e. receiving five per cent of support as is the case in many countries that have proportional representation)? or c) having "national" standing/participation (i.e. running candidates in all/most ridings)?

The Green party does not presently qualify according to the first two, but would under the last. The Bloc Québécois does not qualify under the third (having candidates only in Quebec). A clear criterion must be established, and not by the broadcast consortium itself.

Furthermore, as presently structured, this "media event" can scarcely be called a debate. In part, this is a result of the "debate's" structure, and in part it reflects the hyper-partisan political climate. In recent elections, it has become a forum for presenting highly focus-grouped messages while interacting with the substance of what the other leaders say as little as possible.

It's as much of a "debate" as parliamentary "question period" resembles an actual Q & A — which is to say not at all. What useful content there is in both derives solely from being able to read between the lines and discerning the strategy of political jockeying.

So what's the point?

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