

Top of My Head

Goodman Ace

Instant Debate

WHO SAYS Congress talks too much and doesn't do enough? Not true. The other day the House of Representatives had before it a bill on which debate was limited to forty-five seconds for any member who wanted to talk on it.

The bill concerned a small item of \$21.35-billion, which the Pentagon needed to keep the Vietnam war going smoothly. So much acrimony had set in during the hassle that the forty-five-second debate limit was invoked. That's known as putting your money where your mouth is.

You don't have to be told that the forty-five-second limit didn't set too well with the House members. Right away they had to cut out the oratorical "From the rock-ribbed coast of Maine across the golden wheat fields of Kansas to the sunny shores of California, of our glorious country."

As *The New York Times* told it, Representative Henry S. Reuss, Democrat of Wisconsin, rose to explain his pro-

positional to cut down some of the cost. His proposal was "to trim the funds for air-borne warning, and control system, and an interceptor program." Just explaining that took forty-five seconds. He never got to explain why or how. He was gaveled down. So he "borrowed" forty-five seconds of time from several other colleagues, and at the end of each forty-five-second period he was gaveled down.

Another member rose to cry out: "This is an absolute travesty. We demean the operation of the House." (Gavel.) Another member rose: "A civilized society doesn't stifle opposition, it meets it." (Gavel.)

Pretty soon the \$21.35-billion bill was not being debated. It was the forty-five-second limit that was the hot issue. And finally when the gavel was worn down to a nub, the presiding chairman announced that all time had run out. The bill was passed.

Nevertheless, this instant debate is a commendable procedure in these days of so much rhetoric and so little

action, especially on the political scene. But when you take it out of the House and into the home, it becomes a different kettle of mink.

"What do you mean you need a new mink coat? I just bought you a mink coat a year ago."

"That was not a year ago," she replies. "It was a year ago you made the final payment. And I can give you a lot of reasons why I need a new mink."

"OK, you have forty-five seconds. Go."

"My most important reason is that my coat is much too long. It comes almost down to my ankles. There are new styles now. The latest fashion in mink coats is knee length."

"That's it. Your forty-five seconds are up. In rebuttal I wish to say—"

"Say it in forty-five seconds. Go."

"In the first place, I don't like to see my wife in anything knee length. Especially in mink. If God had wanted mink coats to be knee length, he would have created minks with knee-length pelts. In the second place—"

"OK, your forty-five seconds are up. Now me. I'd like to ask you what you have against my knees? Every time I put on a dress you make some snide comment about my knees. All the girls are wearing short skirts, you don't seem to mind that. But when I wear something that is short, you always knock my knees."

"Time's up. In rebuttal I wish to say that over the years I've always let you buy everything you ever wanted. A more understanding husband you will never find from the rock-ribbed coast of Maine, across the golden wheat fields of Kansas, to the sunny shores of—"

"OK, your forty-five seconds are up."

"Just a minute. I'm borrowing forty-five seconds from my accountant. In his own words I tell you he informed me that we have to keep expenses to a minimum—and he didn't mean a mini mink coat. In the second place, in answer to your absurd comment that I knocked your knees, I can only say it wasn't me. God took care of that."

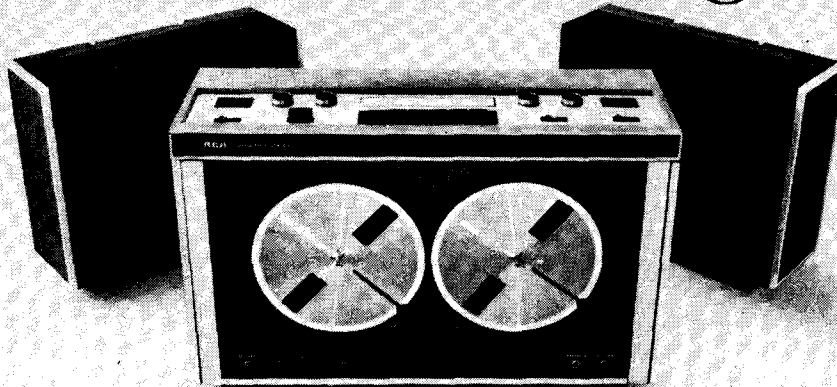
"Now just a minute, you. I want to borrow forty-five seconds from my mother. She told me there would be days like this. She warned me. She told me time and again that I should have married Ralph Tillingworth. And she was ri—"

"Oh, not Ralph Tillingworth again."

"My forty-five seconds aren't up. To think that you—that you would say that about my—about my—"

She begins to cry. And since time began, that is one argument that never lost a debate. Because there never has been a forty-five-second limit to a woman's tears.

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Trade Winds

Jerome Beatty, Jr.

When his wife had to leave town to take care of her ailing mother, Charley Manos of the *Detroit News* looked for someone to take over. He found this ad in his paper: EUROPEAN WOMAN WISHES DAY WORK; EXPERIENCE, GOOD REFERENCE. He called the number listed, and he tells me the interview went this way:

WOMAN: How many in the family?

MANOS: Five, including three children, but one is away.

WOMAN: How many rooms?

MANOS: Uh, three bedrooms and a den, or four bedrooms.

WOMAN: What kind of vacuum cleaner do you have?

MANOS: Standard, I guess. It's electric.

WOMAN: How far is your home from the bus stop?

MANOS: Just two short blocks.

WOMAN: How much do you pay?

MANOS: I don't know. What is the going rate?

WOMAN: I charge sixteen dollars for eight hours, plus bus fare both ways.

MANOS: All right, now can I ask you

some questions—about the reference?

WOMAN: I can't talk now.

MANOS: But your ad said good reference, and—

WOMAN: What happened to the other cleaning woman?

MANOS: She's visiting her mother—I mean, we didn't have one.

WOMAN: I'll call you back.

She never did, and Charley Manos never had the courage to answer another advertisement, so they got along without any help.

I never knew that Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champion, had written an autobiography. It has just been published by Chelsea House under the title, *Jack Johnson Was A Dandy*. Some experts claim that Johnson was the greatest. At the age of forty-eight he fought and beat a twenty-four-year-old who had never lost a fight. Johnson himself thought he could have beaten Dempsey or Tunney when he was in his forties and they were in their prime.

It wasn't only his prize-fighting skill that attracted attention, but his private life, too. Three of his four wives were white, and he refused to play the game as the Establishment wanted. That was sixty years ago, so you can imagine the kind of controversy that he engendered. Johnson fled the country to escape a prison term on a rather phony charge, and he lived a high old life abroad. He finally came back to take his medicine. He died in an auto accident in 1946. Johnson had been shipwrecked, robbed by Mexican bandits, presented at court, befriended by Australian bushmen, and had, as he wrote, "mingled with the frivolous in the noted cafés and restaurants of the continent." Compared to him, a Great White Hope would seem pale, indeed.

In his medical column in the *Houston Chronicle*, Dr. T. R. Van Dellen wrote about "How to get out of a car in water." He said, "If it is not possible to open the door, roll down the window. The water will pour in, but be prepared to wait until the compartment is full in order to equalize the pressure. Then take a deep breath and swim out."

Here are some fragments found by Robert Holkeboer while grading papers for the Department of English at Eastern Michigan University over the years:

"Chekhov spent his whole life looking for the piece that would fill the void in his life."

"When we came out of the dressing rooms at the start of the second half, a great ovulation went up from the audience."

"The church condemns to hell anyone engaging in premartial sex."

"The Dark Ages is just another name for the mid-evil period."

"The only subjects Holden did good in was English."

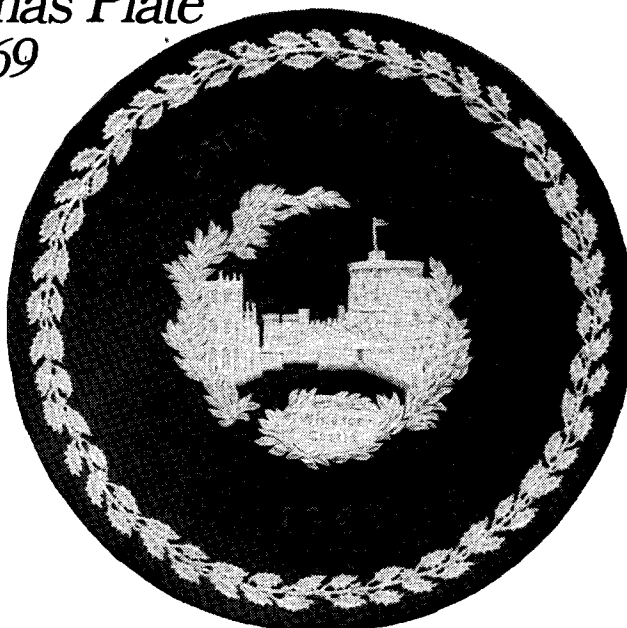
Sharps and Flats: According to the *San Juan Star*, the Ballets de San Juan performed two numbers at the International Theater Festival there in October: "Swam Lake" and "Pas de Dix."

► In a Los Angeles court, a lady's grounds for divorce seemed good enough. She told the judge, "I have reason to believe that my husband is not the father of my last child."

► Robert Lauterborn saw an effective sign in Maine: NO TRESPASSING—SURVIVORS WILL BE PROSECUTED.

► Zander Hollander, who edited *Great American Athletes of the Twentieth Century* (Random), received a fan letter from a young reader that closed with these words: "I hope you write

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