

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Kirk, Fahrenkopf in public embrace

Locked in a near-obscene embrace in front of TV cameras and reporters at the National Press Club July 7, the chairmen of the Democratic and Republican National Committees announced their plans for the 1988 presidential election debates.

Nestled together behind the small podium, Paul Kirk of the DNC and Frank Fahrenkopf of the RNC were surrounded by "cupids," representing the board of the new "Commission on Presidential Debates." Liberal Democratic socialite Pamela Harriman's worn-out face was among them, and the group's advisory board includes a list of the elite so united by political pedigree (namely, the circles of the infamous National Endowment for Democracy) as to be indistinguishable by party: Robert Strauss, Mel Laird, Jody Powell, Barbara Jordan, Holland Coors, and others.

As this reporter noted during the press conference, the combined Democratic-Republican organization was formed as a result of a "hostile takeover" of the presidential debates from the League of Women Voters. As a result, the two parties' leaderships have set up the conditions to prevent any candidate they don't like from surfacing—either from within either party, or as a third-party candidate.

As they said during their press conference, they have taken it upon themselves to define who is a "major" candidate and who is not, and, when asked, offer no criteria for their arbitrary decisions.

"For example, what would Lyndon LaRouche have to do to be considered a 'major' candidate in your eyes?" I asked. "We'll take that under

consultation," Kirk stammered.

I wasn't the only reporter to fire tough questions. The whole scene was a repulsive little embryo of a totalitarian, one-party system that left every thoughtful person there queasy.

Shultz, Abrams sweat over Ollie

While White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater has declined any comment on the first week of testimony given by Lt. Col. Oliver North before the congressional Iran-Contra committees, the same was not true for luminaries down the road at the State Department.

North's determination not to be a scapegoat for the operation to divert funds from the sale of arms to Iran to the Nicaraguan Contras has, in particular, Secretary of State George Shultz and his assistant for Latin American affairs, Elliott Abrams, sweating.

They both issued terse denials of what North said during his second day of testimony July 8. North directly contradicted the earlier sworn testimony of Abrams, when Abrams insisted he was never told of the diversion operation. North also recounted an incident which demonstrated, he said, that Secretary of State Shultz was also fully aware of the matter.

On that occasion, according to North, Shultz came up to North during a reception at the State Department at the height of the Contra "resupply" operation during the period when Congress had cut off funding and, under the Boland Amendment, had prohibited any U.S. military support operations. Shultz put his arm around North's shoulder, according to North's testimony, and said, "Ollie, you are doing a great job. Keep it up!"

Shultz batted out a three-line statement which was tacked up in the State

Department press corridor later that same afternoon. Shultz said that he was just thanking Ollie for his efforts in "keeping up the morale" of the Contras during the period the funding had been cut off—and there was nothing in his remark to indicate that Shultz knew of the resupply operation.

When State Department spokesman Charles Redman, the next day, made reference to the Shultz's note, he added words to the effect that it was "preposterous" for North to create the impression that there was anything more to Shultz's pat on the back than that.

This reporter pointed out, "But it was Colonel North's contention that Secretary Shultz had knowledge of the operation, because, as he testified, Assistant Secretary Abrams was being kept fully briefed on the efforts to establish a southern front, even though Abrams had denied this in his testimony."

Then Redman revealed that not only Shultz, but also Abrams, had been busy at the typewriter after listening to North's testimony. Abrams, he said, had also issued a statement the night before saying, in effect, that he stood by his earlier testimony.

In his earlier testimony, Abrams won praise and oaths of fealty from his boss, Shultz, by testifying to the committees that North "knew better than to tell me anything, because if he did, he knew I would run right to my boss with the news, and my boss would never, ever stand for any of this nonsense!"

However, in his first days on the witness stand, North showed considerable acrimony against those in the "secret government" who gave him his orders and collaborated with him, but on the witness stand have pleaded total ignorance and blamed everything on Ollie's proclivities as the proverbial "loose cannon."