

Letters to The Times

F.C.C. Decision-on Television

Adoption of Color Standards at This Time Held in Public Interest

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

The confusion and misunderstanding about the Federal Communications Commission decision concerning color television has engulfed even THE NEW YORK TIMES editorial page. The editorial of Oct. 18 is appropriately entitled "Television Chaos," but the chaos inheres not in the Commission decision but in your interpretation thereof.

The first error in the editorial is the statement that the Commission "ignored the findings of a committee of scientific experts headed by Dr. E. U. Condon, director of the National Bureau of Standards * * *." This is a charge already made by R. C. A. and nobody else. It is wrong.

The Condon committee and the Commission were functioning in different spheres and with different responsibilities. The Condon committee made no recommendations concerning choice of systems; further, the areas of agreement between the Commission findings and the report of the Condon committee are far greater than the areas of disagreement.

The editorial's basic criticism of the Commission's decision is that the Commission went beyond its functions in not only setting standards but in "dictating to manufacturers what kind of television sets they are to make if images are to be received in color with converters and in black and white with adapters." It is charged, therefore, that the decision constitutes "coercion of an industry" and "usurpation of authority."

These criticisms are based on a complete misunderstanding of the Communications Act, of the function of the Commission and of the effect of the Commission's decision.

Type of Signal

Before radio or television can be broadcast on a regular commercial basis it is necessary that the Commission first set technical engineering standards prescribing the type of signal which must be transmitted. Unless there are such standards it would be possible for each station to send out a different type of signal and the consumer would have to have a different receiver for each station.

Setting standards for broadcast service has always been the procedure followed. It is precisely what the Commission did when it authorized black-and-white television. Once it set black-and-white television standards, any manufacturer who wanted to go into the business of making and selling television receivers obviously had to make receivers designed to receive the signal being transmitted if he wished to offer a usable product.

The editorial itself recognizes this "lock-and-key relationship between a television station and a television receiving set." But having recognized this basic relationship, the editorial then ignored it and thus has been led into its basic error.

Of course, each manufacturer remains free to make precisely the kind of television set he chooses. He can continue to make ordinary black-and-white sets if he thinks he can sell them. He can make any one of a variety of types of sets which will receive color, just as a number of manufacturers are engaged in producing different models to receive the C. B. S. system.

In setting standards for color the Commission has done exactly what it has always done in authorizing any radio or television broadcast service. In this decision, therefore, it has usurped no functions and dictated to no one unless what it has always done constitutes usurpation and dictation. Never before has it been suggested that when the Commission in the past has set standards it has been guilty of "dictation" or "usurpation." It cannot be so suggested because the setting of standards is one of the explicit and necessary functions of the Commission.

Compatibility Problem

Further, it is to be noted that it clearly was in the public interest for the Commission to adopt color standards now, instead of delaying the question further. The Commission concluded, on the basis of ten years' experimentation with color, that there is no reasonable probability that a satisfactory "compatible" color system (that is, a color system capable of being received in black and white on existing receivers without change) can be developed. It found that only the C. B. S. system is now capable of producing satisfactory color, and only the C. B. S. system assured such color for the foreseeable future.

Since the C. B. S. system is "incompatible"—and thus requires changes in existing sets to receive the color signals in black and white—the public interest compelled a prompt decision in order to prevent further aggravation of the compatibility problem. The degree of increased aggravation of the compatibility problem can be measured on the basis of the 8,000,000 sets now in the hands of the public as against perhaps as many as 40,000,000 black-and-white sets in the foreseeable future.

To have postponed the decision would have imposed great additional economic burdens on the public, or deprived it of color altogether unless a satisfactory compatible system should some day be developed—a contingency the Commission did not find likely.

In the light of these basic facts which the editorial overlooked, the criticisms therein were plainly mistaken.

FRANK STANTON,
President, Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

New York, Oct. 18, 1950.

[Mr. Stanton overlooked the fact that we expressly conceded the right of the Commission to set standards, but questioned its right to set up systems of transmission.

That the F. C. C. ignored the Condon

report was brought out on Sept. 10 at the Institute of Radio Engineers' convention in Los Angeles. A question from the floor addressed to a member of the F. C. C. brought the reply: "The Senator Johnson-Condon report was not entered as hearing material and therefore was not given consideration in the F. C. C. decision." The report was issued on July 10—time enough for its consideration.

Mr. Stanton's statement that the "areas of agreement" between the Condon committee and the F. C. C. "are far greater than the areas of disagreement" is not borne out by the Condon report. On Page 40 appears a table in which the system that Mr. Stanton advocated scores only eight points. Of two other systems one scored eleven points and the other six. It looks as if there were more areas of disagreement than of agreement.

Mr. Stanton says that "each manufacturer remains free to make precisely the kind of television set that he chooses." The manufacturer who does not produce a set that will conform with Mr. Stanton's system courts bankruptcy within five years or so.

How does Mr. Stanton know that the odds are against the development of a "compatible" color system? The Condon committee arrived at different conclusions on Pages 37 and 38 of its report.

Mr. Stanton thinks that in the public interest the F. C. C. had to arrive at a prompt decision. The Commission has been considering television for ten years. The Condon committee was appointed because the vacillation and dilatoriness of the F. C. C. forced the Senate to seek the best technical advice that competent technologists could give.—Editor, THE TIMES.]

Traffic Congestion

Enforcement of Parking Regulations, Truck Limitation Favored

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

THE TIMES of Oct. 4 contained a story headed "Billions of Dollars Seen Lost by Delays to Trucking Caused by Traffic Congestion."

Although not a New Yorker, I have visited the city frequently and believe that on the whole the traffic situation is no worse than it is in Baltimore or other comparable cities. Certainly, we have here no such through arteries for long-distance travel within the city as New York has with her new highways.

New York could, however, learn a lesson on the current enforcement of "no parking" regulations in Baltimore. Many of us have learned to our sorrow that the signs mean what they say, and that the police are administering enforcement without fear or favor. It is not an uncommon sight to see police enforcement trucks hauling off locked cars that have been parked in no-parking areas.

Of course, one of the primary causes of traffic congestion in the cities is the very trucks for which the president of the New York State Truck Association made his plea in your article. Private automobiles and local delivery trucks can keep up with the line ahead. The big trucks, and especially those with trailers, move so slowly in cities that they hold up all traffic. And when it comes to turning corners, traffic is completely dislocated. Almost invariably the big trailer trucks have to encroach on the opposing lane of traffic and the drivers of other vehicles are forced to make way.

Mr. Kurtz, in effect, recommends the rebuilding of big cities to accommodate truck traffic. What is needed, instead, is adequate limitation of the size and weight of trucks to prevent their encroaching upon the rights of other drivers and to prevent the huge loss in time and money which such encroachment entails.

HAZEL E. BOYLAND,
Baltimore, Oct. 10, 1950.

Aid for the Big Sisters

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

Here I am again and I would not ask for contributions unless we, the Protestant Big Sisters, were not in dire need of money—good old money. We will be most grateful for any amount that you can send us. I think the Protestants are not doing the work here in New York City for underprivileged children that they should do and we were never so in need of doing good work for them as we are now.

We represent the Protestant Big Sisters and go into the Children's Court and hear their cases. They are so pathetic, and they need us or whatever we can do for them. A little personal touch is what they need and what they want. We go into their homes and are always welcome. We find distraught parents not knowing what to do.

These children need church influences and to feel that someone takes a personal interest and really cares about them, which is apt to change their whole attitude toward life. Remember they are our future citizens. We are apt to forget in this big city our poor unfortunates and our obligations to them. Come to the court sometime where our offices are and see for yourselves.

Now come on and help us. We need it desperately. Kindly send contributions and checks payable to The Big Sisters—it does not matter how small or how big they are—to our treasurer, Miss Sadler, Bank of the Manhattan Company, Madison Avenue and Sixty-fourth Street, New York 21, N. Y.

IRENE GIBSON,
Honorary President, Protestant Big Sisters.

New York, Oct. 18, 1950.

MICROFILM

So vivid is the autumn's flaming glory

That all the ecstasy and all the grief
May be inscribed in one impassioned story,

A microfilm upon a crimson leaf.

INEZ BARCLAY KIRBY.