

TELEVISION CHAOS

The Federal Communications Commission has decided that television images in color must be transmitted by what is technically known as a "non-compatible system," meaning a system that will make it impossible for some eight million owners of television sets to receive even black-and-white from a color-transmitting station without paying about \$400,000,000 for auxiliaries. Hence the consternation and dismay with which the decision has been received. Few voices have been raised in the Commission's defense. In arriving at its decision the Commission ignored the findings of a committee of scientific experts, headed by Dr. E. U. Condon, Director of the National Bureau of Standards, and appointed by the chairman of the Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce to make an impartial study of the status of color television.

The section of the Communications Act under which the Commission promulgated its decree directs it "to encourage the larger and more effective use of radio in the public interest." This broad language may justify the setting of long-term transmission standards to insure fidelity of reproduction in color or black-and-white, brightness of image and high quality in general.

But the Commission has not contented itself with setting standards. In effect it is 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. The Commission admits that the black-and-white images into which color is to be translated by installed sets at great expense will be of inferior quality. Yet the Commission is supposed to safeguard the public interest.

The testimony taken in committee hearings at the time the Communications Act became a law leaves it to be inferred that Congress had no intention of authorizing the Commission to invade the factory. It is true that the Commission's order applies only to television transmitting stations. It so happens that there is a lock-and-key relationship between a television station and a television receiving set. Hence any decision that affects television stations also affects manufacturers of home sets.

This coercion of an industry which has hitherto enjoyed a large measure of freedom is apparently without precedent. In the case of color television we have a usurpation of authority that needs correction. That correction may now be made, for the Communications Act is now coming up in the federal courts for interpretation. The time for the judicial interpretation of the phrase "to encourage the larger and more effective use of radio in the public interest" has arrived.