

TELEVISION IN REVIEW

House Hearings Help to Clear the Air on Color TV, —C. B. S. Passes the Ball to Competitors

By JACK GOULD

The just-concluded hearings on color television before the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce have helped to clear the air on the whole subject of tinted video. So far as the average set owner is concerned, he can relax: color TV still is quite some time off.

Out of the welter of many days of testimony in Washington, these facts now would seem to stand out clearly:

1. Either for economic, technical or legal reasons, no color TV system at the moment is all set to go.

2. On practical grounds the color system of the Columbia Broadcasting System, to all intents and purposes, has been shelved. Even if no better system were devised, the economic headaches attendant to popularizing the C. B. S. method would appear insurmountable. The reason is that C. B. S. color cannot be introduced without disrupting present black-and-white service. No one, not even C. B. S., can afford to pay that price for color.

3. Chief interest now has turned to the color system developed by the National Television System Committee and the Radio Corporation of America. This system can be introduced without disturbing black-and-white service. New color sets would receive color or black-and-white pictures; present sets would continue to get black and white. Economically, that's the only long-range answer.

4. The Federal Communications Commission, which approved the C. B. S. system, has adopted what amounts to a policy of "watchful waiting." Officially, it has not been asked to look at the N. T. S. C. system and is not in a position to say how efficient or practical it is. Until it is asked to consider a new system, the F. C. C., logically enough, says it will stand by the C. B. S. methods, empty though that gesture may be. But the F. C. C. basic position is sound: It should not give approval to a new system without a thorough study of all its details.

5. When the public will get an accurate inkling as to the future

of color TV is anybody's guess at the moment. By another four to six months, however, it should be clear whether the N. T. S. C. system is on the right track. There are said still to be some "bugs" in the system, notably at the camera, and only time will tell how they are being worked out. Even under the most favorable circumstances, it may be many additional months before the F. C. C. finally gives the new system a "green light."

The highlight of the House hearings undoubtedly was the testimony of Frank Stanton, president of C. B. S., who acknowledged that it would be economically foolish to try to introduce his color system under present circumstances.

Many sound engineers, some of them working on the N. T. S. C. system, still will agree that the C. B. S. system technically is much the simplest, if only the transmission of color need be considered. Had this system been introduced many years ago when there were comparatively few sets in existence, by now there might have been considerable color broadcasting. But as events turned out, a series of delays made this approach merely academic. Too many black-and-white sets were put into use to make C. B. S. color feasible.

Most of the industry thought C. B. S. and Mr. Stanton to be on the wrong track, and in the intra-industry in-fighting, left no stone unturned to prove their point. But, for a business leader to acknowledge publicly that he has taken a licking on practical grounds is never easy or commonplace. For his candor Mr. Stanton is to be commended.

The effect of Mr. Stanton's testimony is to clear the way for his opponents to prove that they were right. The F. C. C. also has no choice but ultimately to re-open the whole question of color TV. The proponents of a compatible color system, including R. C. A. and the N. T. S. C., have won a major victory in the color row. But now they, instead of C. B. S., have the responsibility to show that they can deliver the goods.