

THE COLOR DECISION

In Essence, the F. C. C. Postpones It Again

By JACK GOULD

THE long-awaited action by the Federal Communications Commission on the future of color television finally has been taken. After a couple of years of exhaustive tests, hearings and arguments the commission boldly came to its conclusion: it's not sure yet what to do.

That's the nub of the complex, confusing and bewildering "decision" which the F. C. C. has handed down. Every declaratory statement which the commission makes in its announcement is ringed by protective "ifs" and other subjunctive safeguards. Anybody who has not memorized Roget's Thesaurus and done post-graduate work at M. I. T. had better stay away from the F. C. C.'s latest best-seller.

After a few days spent amid the commission's own special world of semicolons, the following appears to be what the F. C. C. did:

It found the color system devised by the Columbia Broadcasting System as far and away the best and indeed the only one ready for commercial introduction. The systems of the Radio Corporation of America and Color Television, Inc., said the F. C. C., were just also-rans.

Difficulties

But, says the F. C. C., the C. B. S. system presents difficulties. For one thing it does not work on the same standards as present black-and-white receivers. If C. B. S. were to transmit a picture in color, you'd have to have a special gadget—the cost might run anywhere from \$40 to \$60—even to get a picture in black and white. A more fancy gadget would be necessary to receive color on an existing receiver.

Since there are an estimated 7,000,000 sets in the hands of the public, the F. C. C. can see where some present viewers might not warm to the idea of throwing their sets out or resuming relations with the Morris Plan.

To avoid that dilemma the F. C. C. has appealed for what it calls the introduction of "bracket standards" in receiver manufacture, i. e., a system whereby you could receive both the existing black-and-white transmissions and the C. B. S. color. The pioneering 7,000,000 viewers would still have to be good sports, but at the least the succeeding millions of set purchasers would have maximum protection.

The F. C. C. has put it up to the set manufacturers and told them to come up with "bracket standards," or else. The "else" is a threat to declare the C. B. S. system as the final, adopted system and let it go at that.

More Hearings?

Here the plot thickens. Aside from the fact that the overwhelming majority of manufacturers have repeatedly denounced the C. B. S. system as "old hat," since it involves a spinning mechanical disk to introduce the colors, the set makers face a further dilemma.

Because the F. C. C. promises that if the manufacturers show good faith in developing the "bracket standards," then the commission will reciprocate. It will give R. C. A., C. T. I., General Electric, Hazeltine and perhaps even Macy's and Gimbels, a chance until Dec. 5 to demonstrate any other color systems. If these color systems have genuine merit and meet rigid tests, C. B. S. will be put in the corner with its face to the wall. And joy of joys, there may be even more hearings, more preliminary decisions and more final decisions.

This loophole apparently represents "a last chance" for the R. C. A., C. T. I. and G. E. contingent, all of whom are working on systems which could be introduced without making obsolete present receivers. Under these systems a picture sent in color could be received in black-and-white without the adding of any gadgets known as adapters or converters.

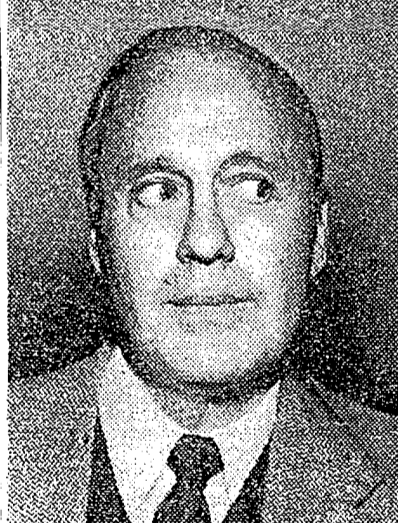
Helping Hand

But even if it turns out that the C. B. S. system is the one finally adopted—and the F. C. C. itself is somewhat skeptical that Columbia's rivals can come up with a better system—its introduction will in large measure depend on the technical genius of R. C. A. With its mechanical disk C. B. S. cannot produce a color picture bigger than that afforded by a 12½-inch tube, which already is practically out of date. If R. C. A. will just rush work on its all-electronic, tri-colored tube, then C. B. S. will be off that particular hook.

There are some more complications, however. In order to introduce its color system C. B. S. would be forced to forego at the start at least virtually all of the existing black-and-white audience. Until adapters and new sets are in homes there would be repeated the same laborious process of "building up" a new audience from scratch that black-and-white video went through. Not all sponsors regard that prospect as entirely appealing.

Under the circumstances it would appear that the public will have to be patient. Until the F. C. C. gives the manufacturers time to make up the commissioner's mind, we will not be able to see in full color either wrestling, impersonations of Humphrey Bogart or the right way to use an all-purpose vegetable paring knife.

PREMIERES



Jack Benny returns to C.B.S. radio tonight at 7 o'clock.



Alan Young opens a new season on C.B.S.-TV Thursday at 9 P.M.



Earl Wrightson, baritone, sings on C.B.S.-TV Monday at 11 P. M.