

In Sync

Up and coming in broadcast technology

Space age competition. When asked his reaction to an RCA-Viacom-Post-Newsweek announcement two weeks ago (BROADCASTING, March 19) about RCA's plan to provide receive-only earth stations to the country's commercial television stations, FCC Chairman Charles Ferris said: "I imagine to some degree it's a decision on their part to have this proposal because the AT&T ban on video programming fare delivered by satellites expires this coming July. And I think it has implications there." The date to mark on calendars is July 23, when the FCC's three-year moratorium on video uses of the three-satellite Comstar system is slated to end. (Comstar is built and owned by Comsat but leased to AT&T and GTE.) The carriers must still formally apply to the commission to lift the ban, and there are petitions before the FCC to continue it. But some of the smart money is betting on video for Comstar. And if it comes to pass, the satellite carrier competition among RCA Americom's Satcom system, Western Union's Westar and Comstar promises to get hot. As Mr. Ferris suggested, the RCA move could be viewed, in part, as a step by that company to remain ahead of AT&T/GTE when their satellites become available for video uses. □ □ □ **Here's what the competition looks like now.** RCA Americom has two 24-transponder satellites aloft with a third slated for launching in December. In 1978, at least 65,000 hours of video programming were relayed via Satcom. In February, 7,000 hours went out over Satcom, and Americom estimates 10,000 per month by June. Western Union has two 12-transponder Westars in orbit and a third ready for a launch planned for August. Last year Westar, which is used by the Public Broadcasting Service, relayed 35,000 hours of video. In addition, Westar is reserved for the upcoming National Public Radio and Mutual Broadcasting System satellite networks. Enter Comstar, which includes three 24-transponder satellites currently capable of handling 36,000 simultaneous telephone conversations. According to AT&T, only two of the Comstars are currently used regularly; the third is employed as a back-up with some use—including video feeds to Hawaii under special arrangements with other carriers. Only parts of 30 of the 48 transponders on the two "working Comstars" are in use, and about 14% of the available 36,000-circuit is employed. On Comstar, 750 voice circuits will operate on one transponder. Generally, one transponder is required for each video circuit, however. Using AT&T's figures, current voice use of Comstar occupies 6.72 transponders, or 7.14% of the available transponders on the two working satellites. That leaves Comstar with a lot of unused video capacity. □ □ □ **Superstations.** As expected, the FCC has approved the application of Eastern Microwave Inc., Syracuse, N.Y., to begin satellite feeds of WOR-TV New York and WSBK-TV Boston to cable television systems. The WOR-TV service will go out over transponder 17 of the RCA Satcom I satellite. The WSBK-TV service will be delayed pending transponder availability. WOR-TV is currently supplied to 120 systems serving two million households via Eastern's terrestrial microwave system. The satellite service will be 24-hour feeds with Eastern transmitting WCBS-TV New York's all-night programming during WOR-TV's off-hours. □ □ □ **NAB add.** Transmitters and antennas look to be the hot items on the exhibit floor of this year's National Association of Broadcasters convention (BROADCASTING, March 19), and yet another company is throwing its hat into the ring—EMI Ltd. of Great Britain. Following the leads of other foreign manufacturers into the high-ticket hardware market—most notably NEC of America (Japan) and Philips—EMI will introduce this week its advanced line of VHF and UHF antennas, which will be marketed by EMI Technology Inc., Glenbrook, Conn. Being introduced initially are EMI's high-power, broadband EMI-Slot panels. The new venture is being headed by Ray Tattershall, who has managed EMI's Toronto subsidiary for the past two years. □ □ □ **Statistics.** The organizers of the Marche International des Programmes de Television (MIP-TV '79), the international television program market (April 20-26 in Cannes, France), have come up with some interesting numbers: 166,380,000 television receivers are now in use in Europe. That's 46.2% of the world's total. North and South America account for 40.3% or 145,166,000. Other continents and their percentages of the world's set population are: 40,075,000 (11.1%) in Asia; 5,523,000 (1.5%) in Oceania, and 2,830,000 (.8%) in Africa. Three countries—the U.S., Japan and the Soviet Union—account for over half of the world's sets, and the U.S., Japan, Canada and Western Europe are where most of the color sets are concentrated. Of the 116 countries with television in 1978, the MIP people say, 60 had color services using either the PAL, NTSC or SECAM systems. A further breakdown reveals that, on a country-by-country basis, PAL is the world's most popular system with 31 nations using it. NTSC is used in 15, and SECAM is employed in 14. □ □ □ **MIP facts.** The April marketplace will bring together 230 television stations and 600 production firms from 94 countries. In 1965, the year of the first MIP, 119 companies from 35 countries were in attendance.

Cablecasting

AT&T takes some antitrust comfort from S.D. decision

Although it's being appealed, suit brought by one-time cable company alleging monopoly practices is turned down; Bell says it shows it has no intention of getting into the CATV business

An Aberdeen, S.D., cable television company that sold out to a competitor in 1971 is continuing a court suit aimed at demonstrating that AT&T and a subsidiary violated the antitrust laws in their dealings with it—and, by implication at least, with other cable systems. After almost eight years of litigation, the U.S. District Court in South Dakota ruled that the alleged violations had not occurred—essentially because the cable system and the telephone company were not in competition—but TV Signal Co. of Aberdeen has filed an appeal with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit in Minneapolis.

Although some lawyers feel the importance of the decision is limited to the facts of the case, AT&T officials describe it as "significant," since it involves the first antitrust action brought against the Bell system by a representative of the industry long fearful of being swallowed up by it. It shows, says a spokesman, AT&T has no intention "to get into the business CATV companies traditionally have offered."

The appeal to a higher court is bound to give the case greater and more wide-reaching importance.

The case stems from the refusal by Northwestern Bell Telephone Co. in 1969 to permit TV Signal to attach its distribution cable to the telephone company's poles. At the time, Northwestern Bell had a one-per-pole policy, and already had a pole-attachment agreement with another cable system, Aberdeen Cable TV Service Inc.

TV Signal thus was obliged to undertake the greater expense of building its plant underground. About three quarters of the plant was built in that fashion before Northwestern Bell changed its policy and accepted TV Signal's cable on its poles. TV Signal sold the system to Aberdeen Cable for a profit of \$340,000 in 1971. But by that time, the antitrust suit was a year old.

The suit alleges that, in pursuing a one-per-pole-policy Northwestern Bell and its parent, AT&T, violated Sections One and Two of the Sherman Act, which prohibit actions aimed at restraining competition and at maintaining and extending monopoly power.

TV Signal, which based its allegations in large part on documents obtained from the defendants, contended that the one-per-pole policy was part of a Bell system response to what was perceived as the