

At Deadline

Sale of NBC Films completes exodus of networks from syndication

NTA to pay \$7.5 million for it and other program units

National Telefilms Associates, Los Angeles, has agreed to purchase NBC Films and several other programing units of NBC for approximately \$7.5 million.

Joint announcements by NTA and NBC last Friday (Feb. 9) said NTA Films, subsidiary of parent company, will purchase all stock of NBC Films and of NBC Canada Ltd. and certain assets of NBC International. Formal completion of transaction and actual transfer of assets are expected to take place soon.

NTA Films is acquiring distribution business of more than 180 television programs and specials, including *Bonanza*, *High Chaparral*, *Get Smart*, *I Spy*, *The Real McCoys*, *Laramie*, and *Divorce Court*.

Programs produced by NBC News will continue to be distributed outside U.S. by NBC Enterprises.

Sale is result of FCC ruling that all network companies must give up their domestic syndication business and certain foreign distribution activities by June 1, 1973. CBS Enterprises was spun off from CBS Inc. two years ago to form Viacom Enterprises, part of Viacom International, and ABC Films has been sold by ABC Inc. to group of key ABC Films officials.

National Telefilms Associates is film-distribution subsidiary of Tele-Communications Inc., Denver, group cable systems operator. Board chairman of NTA is George C. Hatch Jr., who also is officer and substantial stockholder in Tele-Communications Inc.

Network-license proponent gets into AMA-NBC tiff

Representative Samuel L. Devine (R-Ohio) has entered controversy over NBC's *What Price Health?* documentary, with request to FCC that it investigate complaints to determine whether program was factually correct.

One-hour documentary on Dec. 19 has come under heavy criticism from nation's doctors, number of whom have registered complaints with commission.

American Medical Association has "formally and officially" protested "inaccuracy and the over-all bias" of program, and has asked for "equal time" to reply.

Dr. Ernest B. Howard, executive vice president of AMA, in letter to Julian Goodman, president of NBC, said pro-

gram was neither news nor analysis but "pitch for Kennedy-Griffiths health-insurance proposal."

Representative Devine, ranking minority member of House Commerce Committee, said in letter to FCC Chairman Dean Burch last week that commission has duty to investigate such complaints and that he was requesting "short investigation aimed at only one finding"—whether program contained "facts" which were misrepresented or untrue.

Representative Devine said he was not interested in whether program raised fairness-doctrine issue. "If a program has been telecast which misrepresents and distorts the true facts, then we shall take the necessary next step," he added.

FCC has consistently held that it is not "arbiter of truth" and that it will not check into accuracy of news programing absent extrinsic evidence of wrongdoing on part of licensee.

Representative Devine also wrote Mr. Goodman to ask his cooperation in requested investigation, and to ask for information he said would aid in determining whether case like *What Price Health?* justifies enactment of his proposal to license networks.

Mr. Devine asked number of affiliates that carried program, whether they had opportunity to view program tape before air time and whether program was produced under direction and control of NBC. He also wanted to know if NBC officers reviewed program before broadcast.

Network had not discussed any comment on controversy as of Friday.

Sarnoff says ITU planning needed now to forestall satellite chaos later

Robert W. Sarnoff, chairman of RCA, called Friday (Feb. 9) for International Telecommunications Union to take lead in developing "an effective system for dealing with global problems that span regulation, legislation and international relations." Without such system, he said, arrival of direct-broadcast satellite may escalate current confusion into "an electronic free-for-all of worldwide dimensions." He proposed creation of small ITU working group to get project under way.

Mr. Sarnoff, addressing Executives Club of Chicago, said large scale satellite-to-home broadcasting will soon be technically feasible, with tests scheduled later this year in Rocky Mountain area and next year in India. He did not envision it as replacing existing TV system in U.S. and other countries where television is well established, but rather as providing supplementary programs. But, he said, it will certainly require better

than current "global patchwork of national policies rooted in the past and reflecting more improvisation than design."

Mr. Sarnoff noted that some countries, such as Russia, want strict censorship of programs broadcast directly to homes by satellite while others, such as U.S., want no restrictions. He proposed compromise, at outset, on "broad middle ground."

Satellite convention being planned by United Nations, he said, "should specify as a basic principle the commitment of all nations to the eventual goal of unrestricted programing. It should also specify broad categories of programs that all would agree to accept without censorship or prior approval. These provisions would recognize the legitimate concern of many nations, including the underdeveloped countries fearful of undue foreign influence. Yet they would acknowledge a commitment to the principle of freedom for the exchange of ideas and information."

Other issues requiring resolution on global basis, Mr. Sarnoff said, include copyright, libel, equitable access to facilities and preservation of order among all satellite systems.

He said ITU, an agency of UN, is only existing body that might logically bring order out of current confusion but that it has historically steered clear of political issues and must be given "a broader franchise" in era "when every technical decision touches the vital interest of every country."

INTV chairman says independents will bill \$330 million in '73

At least eight independent TV stations in top-25 markets will rank first or second in audience and revenues in their markets within five years, Roger D. Rice of KTVU(TV) Oakland-San Francisco, chairman of Association of Independent Television Stations (INTV), predicted in speech to Radio-Television Research Council in New York. He forecast that in much less time than that—this year, in fact—independents' total billings will reach \$330 million, up from \$248.3 million reported by FCC for 1971 and \$285.5 million projected by Mr. Rice for 1972.

FCC cable rules encouraging CATV systems to favor independents, Mr. Rice said, are rapidly making them "regional stations" with larger audiences far beyond their broadcast service areas, creating for advertisers TV's counterpart of radio's 50-kw clear-channel stations. And, he said, network affiliates are becoming more and more independent of networks: In top-25 markets, he reported, there are