

of the Sagan complaint. In fact, the newsman's lawyer, Leonard Ring, stated that his client "doesn't care about NBC offering the complainant in this instance, or in any case for that matter, free time on the air . . . it's NBC's airtime, and it can throw it away as it likes."

A prickly dispute began to surface, however, after Mr. Sagan's appeal of his complaint to the FCC—filed, says WMAQ-TV management, on the last day (late July) before appeal privileges were to elapse. Mr. O'Connor's side of it is that NBC attorneys met "secretly" with Mr. Sagan's attorneys to offer Mr. Sagan airtime "in return for the complainant's dismissing his appeal." The "secret negotiations," Mr. O'Connor declares, were "made behind my back."

The station's side of it, from General Manager Lee Schulman, is that "we just wanted to make it perfectly clear to him [Mr. Sagan] that we were perfectly delighted to have him on the air any time." Furthermore, Mr. Schulman stresses, Mr. O'Connor was notified in advance twice—once in conversation and once via memorandum—that the invitation was to be extended to Mr. Sagan to appear alone, without benefit of Mr. O'Connor's on-air presence. Mr. O'Connor insists he

was not informed of the agreement until "after the fact."

Mr. Schulman says NBC is puzzled by Mr. O'Connor's claims, and that WMAQ-TV management has never been approached with the breach of contract line by either Mr. O'Connor or his attorney, although station-commentator negotiations are currently being conducted concerning, it is indicated, the termination of Mr. O'Connor's contract. "We don't understand his threats of lawsuit," Mr. Schulman insists. "Our greatest defense of his journalistic right is proven—he has been on the air and can say whatever he chooses to."

Mr. O'Connor used that right for three consecutive evenings last month to lambaste his station management for its treatment of him in the Sagan matter. On Sept. 25, Mr. O'Connor accused NBC of abridging his freedom of speech, and of "violating my rights under the First Amendment," and hinted at a lawsuit. The following evening he charged the station with "compromising my integrity." The third evening, Sept. 27, before WMAQ-TV management signaled an end to the on-air attacks against it, he claimed NBC was secretly planning to fire him, "after this controversy between us cools off for a couple of months."

"It would hurt NBC's image," Mr. O'Connor went on, "if they put the knife into me right away, so it figures that they will wait for a better time. Well, that's OK with me, but I think that NBC should play it on the square for a change; if they want to take my head off, they don't have to wait until they get me in a dark alley. If NBC had any guts, they would do it right now, with some degree of honor."

Another NBC O&O adds news muscle

Expansion of early-evening block, more budget, added staff mark start of try for improved ratings

NBC-owned WKYC-TV Cleveland today (Oct. 14) becomes the latest major market station to adopt a two-hour early-evening news format. The move, which station officials admit was prompted in part by WKYC-TV's third place among Cleveland network affiliates in news ratings, involves the addition of 30 minutes to the evening package, an increase of approximately 33% in the news budget, and an almost 50% increase in personnel involved in the news operation.

Cleveland, WKYC-TV News Director Richard Lobo said, is a ripe market for the two-hour format. "Rush hour here ends at 5:30. We estimate that 85% of the total audience is home by then. And it increases to 90% at six o'clock."

WKYC-TV will start its evening coverage at 5:30 with anchorman Scott Osborne, who came to the station from NBC's WNBC-TV New York. Following Mr. Osborne will be Doug Adair (who previously handled all three local newscasts at the station) and Mike Landers (newly acquired from KYW-TV Phila-

delphia), who will team on the next hour of local newscasting and then will return for the 11 p.m. program. The two-hour package will be completed by NBC *Nightly News* at 7 p.m.

About two dozen people have been added to the news department, Mr. Lobo said. He added that additional technicians and production staffers brought into the news operation have increased the unit's total strength from 60 to 100. The news format has also been broadened to include special features such as a consumer-action segment, an entertainment calendar and regular restaurant reviews. Two Ikegami minicams are on order, which should enable WKYC-TV to move into live remote reporting via microwave by Jan. 1, 1975, Mr. Lobo said.

Although the move to a two-hour news block is not unprecedented among NBC stations, Mr. Lobo maintained the idea for the WKYC-TV change was his, and that it took no small amount of persuasion to bring it about. "We had a special contingent go to New York with the idea, right to the top of NBC management."

Ford innovates

President moves news conference out to the Rose Garden, allows reporters to pursue him with follow-up questions

President Ford tried something new in the way of televised White House news conferences last week. Whether or not it elicited more information than the news conferences that Presidents in recent years have held in the East Room of the White House, the experience seemed a pleasant one for all concerned.

The conference was held outdoors, in the Rose Garden, and a rule was followed permitting each reporter who was recognized to remain on his feet to ask a follow-up question. The object was to meet reporters' criticism that the President can always avoid a direct answer to a hard question, then leave the questioner behind by going on to another reporter.

The result was that 19 reporters—somewhat fewer than the usual number for a half-hour news conference—were recognized, and seven of them asked follow-up questions. And although many questions were geared to the President's message on the economy he had delivered to the Congress the day before, reporters did ask about a wide variety of international and domestic matters.

The reporters seemed to enjoy the change. At a minimum, the open and peaceful surroundings appeared to ease the tensions that usually are evident in the East Room.

News Secretary Ron Nessen had said the new format was being tried on "an experimental basis." When the news conference—held on a warm, clear afternoon under a brilliant blue sky—had ended, he indicated it had gone just fine.

But presidential aid Robert Hartmann, who was standing nearby, observed: "You won't be able to do this through the winter."

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