

'MORALS' INQUIRY

BACK into the English lexicon came two pre-World War I words—"hootchie-cootchie" and "shimmy"—as a subcommittee of the House Interstate & Foreign Commerce Committee opened its probe last week into "immoral" radio and TV programs.

The hearings, established by a resolution sponsored by Rep. E. C. Gathings (D-Ark.) [B•T, June 2, March 24, 3, Feb. 11], which were held three mornings, saw a parade of witnesses made up mostly of temperance leaders objecting to beer, wine and liquor advertising and drinking scenes.

The subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Oren Harris (D-Ark.), recessed last Thursday after completing the roster of congressional and civic witnesses. Only Rep. Gathings and Rep. Joseph R. Bryson (D-S. C.), adherent of "dry" forces, were Capitol Hill witnesses.

Industry Will Testify

Resumption of the hearings in another week or two is expected to see industry witnesses take the stand to rebut impressions left with the subcommittee that radio-TV programs are replete with licentiousness, horror, crime, drinking and vulgarity.

It is believed that NARTB officials will carry the ball for the industry. Whether representatives of networks or individual stations will appear was not apparent at the week's end. On Friday morning, the TV Code Compliance Committee was scheduled to meet with Rep. Harris and the subcommittee.

Following the industry, the FCC is expected to tell its side of the story. It has already complied with Rep. Harris' request by furnishing the subcommittee with a breakdown of program complaints.

Only specific proposals as to what Congress might do about the level of morality in radio and TV programs were:

(1) Continuance of hearings by the subcommittee to permit objections to be made to programs violating good taste—recommended

by Rep. Gathings.

(2) Establishment of a National Citizens Advisory Board to act as a "rallying point" for those concerned with program level. This was recommended by Lloyd Halvorson of the National Grange. This is similar to the proposal of Sen. William Benton (D-Conn.) whose bill (S 1579) is before the Senate Interstate & Foreign Commerce Committee.

All witnesses, as well as subcommittee members, shied away from any suggestion of censorship or legislation. There was some talk of giving the FCC more power to deal with so-called objectionable material on the air.

Only witness who cited specific shows in an original statement to the subcommittee was Elizabeth A. Smart of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union.

It was Rep. Gathings who set the tone of the hearings when he described one act of a *You Asked For It* program in which a young woman in a grass skirt did the "hootchie-cootchie" and ended it with a "shimmy" while bending backward with her hands on the floor behind her. In close proximity to her, Rep. Gathings said, was a young man "thinly clad."

In describing the incident, Mr. Gathings held up his hands and demurely wriggled his hips.

'Drys' Take Offensive as Hearings Begin

Rep. Gathings also alluded to improvements noticeable in TV programs since the TV Code became effective March 1. Necklines are higher, he said, calling attention to Dagmar's more modest exposure. But, he said, he did not think the industry could police itself in the long run. "Competition is keen and great financial stakes are involved," he said.

Other witnesses also expressed satisfaction with improvements in programs since the establishment of the industry's TV Code.

Mr. Gathings' prime objection, however, was to the number of crime shows on the air. He cited Thursday night, when three of the four TV outlets in Washington showed crime shows, while the fourth presented wrestling from Chicago. He also expressed a strong

dislike of horror shows. "Long, bony fingers come at you, with deep, mournful music," he intoned.

Impact of such a cumulation of violence, Mr. Gathings emphasized, was on children. He admitted the programs were seen at 10 p.m., but declared that many children and adolescents were still up at that hour.

Statement by Rep. Arthur G. Klein (D-N.Y.) that Mr. Gathings had an alternative to watching such programs: "Don't watch the damn thing at all—turn it off," drew from Mr. Gathings the observation that such a statement was like saying, "Don't buy a TV set."

"Radio and TV are essential to the American home, like the automobile," he said.

Rep. Bryson, although mainly concerned with alcoholic advertising on the air, cited his opposition to programs which depict a "lack of reverence and respect for marital bonds." Some programs, he said, tend to discredit marriage vows, and deal with domestic unhappiness, marriage breakups, even the exchanging of wives. He also expressed the opinion that European films on TV were bad for morals.

Root of programming evils is the concentration of the broadcasting industry in New York City,

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Not All 'Immoral'

ALL was not negative at last week's hearings by the Harris Subcommittee on "immoral" radio and television programs. Favorite programs of subcommittee members and witnesses were named as: Ed Sullivan, Ed Wynn, *The Lone Ranger*, *Gangbusters*, *Treasury Men in Action*, Fred Waring, Herb Shriner.

CANDIDATES' COMPLAINTS FCC to Act

PROMPT action on the complaints of Sens. Robert A. Taft (R-Ohio) and Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.) that radio-TV networks refused them time equivalent to that given Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was promised by the FCC last week. At week's end, the Commission was awaiting comments on the complaints from ABC, CBS and NBC.

Some observers thought the Commission might act this week.

Both Senators Taft and Kefauver held that radio-TV coverage of the General's Abilene speech and subsequent news conference was of a political nature and that they should have similar facilities afforded them in accordance with the mandate of Sec. 315 of the Communications Act. Section 315 provides that if licensees permit the use of their facilities to one candidate, they must provide equal time to all other candidates.

First refusal of time was made by CBS which denied requests for facilities equal to those allotted Gen. Eisenhower by answering that it considered the Abilene address "a news event and not a political speech" and therefore did not feel that the equal-time provision applied.

A similar CBS answer to Sen. Kefauver, who had requested 30 minutes of AM-TV time immediately following the General's talk,

prompted Gael Sullivan, Mr. Kefauver's campaign manager, to say, "It is inconceivable how anyone at CBS could be so politically naive as to assume that this is a fact." Mr. Sullivan denounced radio-TV coverage of the General's "first political speech" as "a product of high-priced hucksters . . . dreamed up for the sole purpose of monopolizing" broadcast time for one Republican candidate.

ABC, reportedly asked by Sen. Taft for broadcast time Friday, was understood to have given a negative answer on the grounds that "All we are doing for Gen. Eisenhower is what previously we have done for you and other candidates."

The network pointed out that it had given free AM-TV coverage to the Senator's talk in Detroit Oct. 15, prior to its adopting in January a policy of charging political candidates commercial fees, and noted that Gen. Eisenhower had not had "available to him comparable ABC radio and television time." The network also pointed out that it had not granted the General's request for television time, since it would have required line charges not incurred by its Detroit coverage of the Taft talk.

A request to ABC from Sen. Kefauver was understood to have

been answered similarly.

NBC denied time to Sen. Taft earlier in the week on the basis that the General's homecoming was of national interest and could be classified as deserving of legitimate news coverage, and spokesmen explained that NBC coverage of Gen. Eisenhower's activity was only in proportion to that offered other candidates while the General was still overseas. The network further explained that it did not consider Sen. Kefauver, a Democratic candidate, in direct competition with the General for the Republican nomination.

First Political Speech

WQXR New York, station of the *New York Times*, carried its first speech by a political candidate for the Presidential nomination when it broadcast the Abilene speech Wednesday, and acceded to Sen. Taft's request for equivalent air time. The station will broadcast a talk he is scheduled to give before the National Republican Club in New York from 1:30-2 p.m. EDT Thursday.

Radio-TV coverage by major networks and many local stations was almost constant as Gen. Eisenhower progressed through his Pentagon press conference Tuesday, his Abilene speech Wednesday

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