



Digital discussion. This panel session, "The Near-Term Future for Digital Television," brought together a veritable "Who's Who" of digital video experts (l to r): Merle Thomas, Public Broadcasting Service; Fre-

derick M. Remley, University of Michigan; Charles Ginsburg, Ampex; Robert Hopkins, RCA; Al Goldberg, CBS Technology Center; Willard Bucklen, TRW, and John Lowry, Digital Video Systems.

seminar reviewed the issue from two points of view—the broadcaster's and the producer's. Tom Keller, chief engineer of WGBH-TV Boston and chairman of the Broadcaster's Ad Hoc Committee on Television Blanking Widths, read a paper written on behalf of the committee by Frank Davidoff, staff consultant and advanced technology expert for CBS-TV's engineering and development department. The paper reviewed the blanking standards required by the FCC and discussed how problems can occur in broadcast operations. Besides the difficulties presented by maladjusted or inadequate equipment, it was stressed that the manipulations of the TV signal that have become a normal part of modern-day broadcast practices all threaten blanking tolerances. Even "without sloppiness," Mr. Keller said, "we can have blanking grow in our systems." (The FCC's standards were devised even before color broadcasting came in.)

That was also the essence of the paper presented by Blair Benson of Video Corp. of America, who said that production houses are subjecting their material to more and more processing steps before it's even submitted for broadcast—among them, synchronization, field and frame storage, duplicate mastering, editing and adding of special effects. Mr. Benson suggested that television receiver manufacturers might bear some of the FCC's regulatory burden for coping with blanking problems, and called for "a modification of FCC rules compatible with the new complexity" of video production.

Mr. Keller said that the broadcasters' committee plans within the next two weeks to mail a questionnaire on blanking, which is to go to most of the television stations in the country. It was designed to collect (anonymously) data on just what blanking tolerances broadcasters are experiencing, with the intent of establishing a statistical base from which to gauge the extent of the problem.

The engineers also devoted considerable energy to satellites. In addition to a morning-long session dealing exclusively with the new Public Broadcasting Service distribution system, another session, "Satellite Equipment and Delivery Systems," examined a number of developments in extra-terrestrial networking.

James W. Cuddihy of RCA Americom,

speaking on "Future Developments in Satellite Communications," took a look into his own "crystal ball" and saw, he said, more powerful satellites with longer lifetimes and greater capacity for the 1980's. Satellites are moving to higher, less crowded frequencies, Mr. Cuddihy said, and as that happens there will be "a great increase in the in-orbit capacities" of the new satellites. With the beginning of space shuttle flights in the early 1980's, he said, new birds, such as the advanced Westar, will be sent aloft with much more power equipment—allowing, in turn, for much smaller, less expensive earth terminals. (According to Mr. Cuddihy, applications for extremely small—by present standards—10-foot dishes are already pending at the FCC.)

Another pay-off from the space shuttle, he said, will be "replaceable payloads" and in-space servicing of satellites. Rather than send up a new satellite every seven years or so, it will be possible in the future to refit existing birds with new equipment. (At present, he said, it costs \$30 million or more to launch a satellite, but, with the space shuttle launch, costs will be considerably lower.)

SSS tangles with RCA over transponder for WGN-TV

Superstation carrier says satellite channel is being held hostage over law suit; RCA cites technical problems with it, no room on others

Only days after the FCC signaled a new policy direction on TV superstations by granting four resale carriers the right to distribute WGN-TV Chicago nationwide by satellite (BROADCASTING, Oct. 30) one of those firms, Southern Satellite Systems, has withdrawn from the competition.

Or was pushed out, as the firm has indicated.

In an Oct. 30 memo to the resale carrier's cable system customers, Edward Taylor, president of Southern, announced that transponder 13 on the RCA Satcom I

satellite had failed, and that RCA had "refused" his request to transfer the service to another transponder "unless Satellite Communication System [a joint venture of Southern and Holiday Inns] would agree to drop the law suit over transponder 18." (SCS filed a suit Oct. 16 in Tulsa, Okla., to retain use of the transponder past Jan. 1, 1979.)

Mr. Taylor said in his memo that Southern "could not accept these conditions" and that it would "pursue its rights" to another transponder on Satcom I with the FCC. "We expect this to be a lengthy hearing," he wrote, but "when we win the right to a reassigned transponder we will assign it to whatever service appears most feasible at that time, probably WPIX(TV) New York."

Mr. Taylor suggested that his customers who still want to carry WGN-TV sign with one of his competitors, United Video, which is scheduled to occupy transponder 3 and is now awaiting tariff approval.

According to Mr. Taylor, the loss of the WGN-TV service, which represented up to \$2 million worth of business, immediately affects some 70 cable systems with 300,000 subscribers. Feeds were expected to have begun sometime this month, and Southern expected many more systems to sign on after the service started.

When asked by BROADCASTING whether the RCA position amounted to the satellite company dangling a transponder in front of Southern in return for dropping the suit, Mr. Taylor replied: "If you weren't a reporter, I'd have a stronger word for it."

Donald Quinn, an RCA spokesman, read a statement by RCA Americom President Andrew Inglis, stating that the transponder was "indeed exhibiting some erratic behavior" but that RCA had not yet declared it inoperable. According to Mr. Inglis's statement, the transponder may still be used.

RCA refused, however, to comment on Mr. Taylor's charge that it had offered Southern a new transponder in exchange for dropping the suit. Mr. Quinn said that RCA had offered to shift the SCS transponder 18 service to transponder 1 and that transponder 13 was "being looked at" by the company's engineers. He said it would be "extremely difficult because of the full-capacity situation" to assign Southern another satellite channel.