

Radio: Booming FM Ponders Future

F.C.C. Rule on Ties to AM Stations Decried

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WASHINGTON, March 21— A record growth of frequency-modulation radio was reported at today's opening session of the annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters. But a controversy developed immediately over what course the high-fidelity medium should pursue, including a suggestion that FM needed more bop and and less Bach.

The dispute among broadcasters turned on a ruling by the Federal Communications Commission that beginning Oct. 15 the owner of an amplitude-modulation station (AM) in a city of 100,000 population or more could not duplicate more than 50 per cent of his programming on his FM affiliate.

Kenneth A. Cox, a member of the commission, told the broadcasters that the rule, adopted last July, was designed to stop a waste of channels by not allowing the same program to be broadcast on two outlets simultaneously. The second channel could offer a different service and afford the listener a greater choice in programs, he maintained. The commission left the door open to grant exemptions in cases where duplication was of an unusual nature.

If exemptions are not granted the stations in the New York metropolitan area, the most heavily affected by the rule, would be WNBC, WCBS, WPAT, WNEW, WVNJ and WQXR.

WABC and WNYC would be affected to a lesser extent because for some hours they program AM and FM separately.

Mr. Cox maintained that independent FM stations were now at an economic disadvantage because AM station owners gave away their FM audiences as a bonus to advertisers buying time on the AM stations.

Ben Strouse, president of WWDC-FM, Washington, deplored the ban on duplication as meaning in effect that the

introduction of more stations competing for the same volume of advertising. In large cities such as New York and Washington, he said, there was a sufficient choice in radio programming now and further fragmentation of the audience would lead to a deterioration of quality.

"The F.C.C. loves FM too much," Mr. Strouse said.

Oliver J. Keller, president of WTAX, Springfield, Ill., applauded the limitation on duplication and agreed that it was in the public interest for a broadcaster owning both AM and FM stations in the same community to offer different services. He said that tomorrow he would carry news of the Gemini flight on AM and music on FM.

Adding to the ferment over FM radio were the uniformly favorable statistics reflecting the medium's spectacular expansion in the last year or two. The number of FM sets in use now stands at 28.5 million, according to Mr. Strouse. Three to 5 per cent of new car radios are FM. More than 200 FM stations started broadcasting last year, bringing the total to more than 1,200. More than 300 are equipped for stereophonic broadcasting.

Everett Dillard, president of WASH-FM and WDON (AM) in the Washington area, cited such statistics as proof that FM was becoming a mass medium.

He said that the works of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms had been fine for establishing the FM medium but that classical music had been overdone and FM should now "give all segments of the public what they want in programming."

David Polinger of station WTFM in New York said he thought FM's future rested with the adult audience and indicated willingness to let AM radio and television have the teen-agers.

Coincidental with the FM discussion was the disclosure by Jack D. Summerfield, general manager of WRVR, New York, that the Riverside Church's outlet will switch to an all-talk format during weekday evening hours, beginning April 1. Ed Beach's popular jazz program would become a breakfast show,

Cox Tells Broadcasters to End Air Waste

running from 7 to 9 A.M. on weekdays, he said.

The new format, which comes after the decision of WINS to give up rock 'n' roll and become an all-news outlet, will enable the noncommercial station to offer discussions, conversations and reportorial studies in depth, Mr. Summerfield said.

It was also learned that WNBC, apparently anticipating the possibility of being forced to separate its AM and FM radio stations, has made informal inquiries of WRVR whether it might be able to furnish some programs to WNBC-FM.

The F. C. C. rule on duplication was originally scheduled to become effective Aug. 1 but two weeks ago was extended until October at the request of individual broadcasters. A number of petitions to reconsider the entire rule, including those from the National Association of Broadcasters, the Columbia Broadcasting System and WQXR, were turned down. Stations seeking exemptions must file requests for waivers by April 15.