

# R. C. A.'S NEW COLOR

## Corporation Exhibits An Improved System

By JACK GOULD

**L**AST week's demonstration of the improved color system of the Radio Corporation of America materially changes the whole outlook on the dispute over video in natural hues.

To put it succinctly, the wide disparity in the quality of the Columbia Broadcasting System's color method and that of the R. C. A. no longer exists. The two systems, in so far as a layman can judge, are now roughly comparable. And unless all accepted criteria have suddenly become faulty, the Radio Corporation of America appears to have a decided advantage over the long pull.

The success of the demonstration, which is a bright feather in the cap of Brig. Gen. David Sarnoff, chairman of the board of R. C. A., puts the Federal Communications Commission on a spot which appears certain to become increasingly controversial and embarrassing. Technically, it ultimately may be proved that the F. C. C. committed a classic "boner."

Last October the Federal Communications Commission put its stamp of approval on the Columbia method, and, judging solely by the color picture that could be seen, it was a decision that made sense. The C. B. S. images at that time were so superior to the R. C. A. tints that there could have been no other choice.

### Decision

Prior to the commission's decision, however, R. C. A. had pleaded for an extension of time to perfect its system further. The Commission swept aside these petitions and went ahead with its formal indorsement of C. B. S. color. Two of the commissioners, however, suggested additional delay to see what R. C. A. could produce.

The majority of the commissioners, however, could not be blamed entirely for the decision to go ahead. Many times in the past the Radio Corporation has asked for more time. Once when the concern squirmed under pressure from the F. C. C., its officials came out with fantastically exaggerated claims for their system. When the system was shown at that time, it was pretty much of a dud. That, frankly, was a tactical error on General Sarnoff's part.

There followed an impasse which inevitably left independent observers rather confused. General Sarnoff and most of the engineers insisted that with time they could make the grade in terms of picture quality, and their past record certainly warranted respect for their opinions. But at the same time their pictures were poor and the C. B. S. images were good. It was up to General Sarnoff to match his many words with a convincing deed.

At last Tuesday's demonstration in Washington, General Sarnoff did, impressively. His company's pictures were stable, had good fidelity for the most part and enjoyed acceptable brilliance. At times the images seemed less "warm" than those of C. B. S., but, on the other hand, they did not have the moments of harshness which have been noticeable on C. B. S. color.

### Comparison

The color fidelity in the main met the test of direct view comparison with the scene itself in the studio. Most of the gowns shown were faithfully reproduced, but one lavender ensemble did have an excessively bluish hue. Too, the primary color of green appeared to get out of control to some extent, though not to a degree that impaired the picture. A white blouse, for instance, had a green overcast.

In the last analysis neither system has achieved absolute perfection. If flaws are noticeable under some circumstances in one system, they also are noticeable under different circumstances in the other.

Actually, the gap between the quality of the two systems has now been closed to the point where it is virtually impossible to judge the systems without seeing them both work side by side and also under far more varied and stiffer conditions than have prevailed in either the R. C. A. or C. B. S. tests.

With the two systems now putting on pictures approaching the same quality, additional technical factors assume a far greater importance, probably a determinative importance, as a matter of fact, than they did when C. B. S. alone had such a wide lead.

### Arguments

The first of the factors is the question of compatibility. In order for a present set to receive black-and-white the C. B. S. method requires use of an adapter; the R. C. A. system does not. Obviously, it is foolish to go to all the cost and inconvenience of adding adapters unless there is some clear-cut advantage in doing so. If the usefulness of present sets can be preserved without extra expense and good color simultaneously brought along, as the R. C. A. demonstration indicates is feasible, that would seem the thing to do.

As for converting present sets to receive color images, both the R. C. A. and C. B. S. devices obviously are makeshifts. If the C. B. S. converter has the drawback of the unattractive spinning disk, the R. C. A. process has the drawback of being cumbersome and, in a lot of sets, might not work at all. This corner, having seen all the con-

verters, would prefer to start with a set originally designed and built for color reception.

For the moment, of course, the R. C. A. demonstration adds to the complications surrounding the future of color video. Not only is there a battle in the Federal courts, where R. C. A. is contesting the F. C. C. order, but the economic and engineering aspects are certain to be argued with renewed intensity.

After last week's demonstration, Wayne Coy, the F. C. C. chairman, stated that the commission is not refusing to look at improvements in color systems, including that of R. C. A. It might be added that, so far as public opinion is concerned, last week's demonstration scarcely leaves any alternative to such a course.