

## ***TV: A.B.C. Still Seeking a Distinctive News Image***

### **Panels of Experts Give Diffuse Impression**

By JACK GOULD

**T**HE American Broadcasting Company's News Department is striving to find a nightly format that will set it apart from the established services of the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company. Its most recent innovation is to make another change in its anchor man and to introduce the so-called spectrum theory of commentary, inviting specialists of varied political leanings to present personal editorial opinions on the day's events. In New York the program is seen at 7 P.M. on weekdays over Channel 7.

In the person of Frank Reynolds, previously assigned to Washington, A.B.C. appears to have found a journalist of promise for the anchor role. At least Mr. Reynolds conveys the needed sense of familiarity with the news, Walter Cronkite of C.B.S. remains the master of subtle variations in intonation of speech and facial expression, to give a measure of punctuation and emphasis to his report. But Mr. Reynolds is an improvement over his predecessors, who could not overcome the impression of being handsome announcers merely reading a script that was in front of them.

Mr. Reynolds and his colleague, Howard K. Smith, a veteran of the TV commentary wars, are free to advance their own viewpoints; these segments are clearly labeled. Thus far, on the basis of a random sampling over two weeks, their contributions in general have been more provocative than those of the rotating panel of outside experts. Obviously, there will be a period of shaking down—and shaking out—the new format, which is an interesting move to incorporate the rising popularity of TV talk shows within the framework of a newscast.

There will be duds under the system, such as Malcolm Muggeridge's strained essay comparing the plight of the

English pound with a human patient under medical care. But Louis E. Lomax, the Negro journalist, was effectively hard-hitting apropos the trials of "Resurrection City." George Bailey's analysis of the newest difficulties of Berlin was so foreshortened as to be hardly worth the trouble.

The drawback of having a pool of 20-odd specialists ready for instant expertise is that a viewer does not easily identify with any one individual. The use of one analyst could be more conducive to the regular habit of tuning in, as is the case with Eric Sevareid of C.B.S.

The A.B.C. change does have some element of similarity to the N.B.C. format revision to make room for a stable of contributing editors. In both cases there may be the peril of having too many stern faces solemnly delivering bulletins or punditry in the cold environment of a studio.

By contrast, the C.B.S. practice of stressing its men in the field seems to be working especially well at the moment, particularly in Charles Kuralt's sensitive vignettes of remote Americana. Individuality of reporting, particularly in the turning of a distinctive phrase, seems to be a noticeable C.B.S. advantage.

**'The Prisoner' Opens**  
Patrick McGoohan, who

### **Frank Reynolds Moved From Capital Staff**

starred in "Secret Agent," is both the principal player and executive producer of the summer replacement entitled "The Prisoner," which is seen at 7:30 P.M. Saturdays over C.B.S. He has concocted a lavishly produced exercise in obscurity, something to do with a counterintelligence operation in an island village that is a model for a rest home in 1984.

The numbered inhabitants of the island, largely a puzzling collection of elderly folk with unexplained pasts, have no hope of escape, but the determined Mr. McGoohan refuses to surrender to the machinations of Overseer No. 2 and his perceptive gadgetry. The weekly feature of the program is the sounding of the orange alert, which sends omnipotent balloons bouncing across adjacent waters and skies to recapture a fugitive in skiff or helicopter.

In the absence of any appreciable detail as to what "The Prisoner" is all about, Mr. McGoohan requires a viewer to work as hard as he does, which is an odd approach to relaxing the set-owner in preparation for his labors next fall.