

# don maclean



The broadcasters' problems with AFTRA (American Federation of Television & Radio Artists) are nothing compared to what's looming ahead. It seems that Fidel Castro is building — with Russian help — some super-powerful transmitters designed to reduce U.S. broadcasting to a hopeless jumble of Spanish. • Only those stations on the Western side of the Rockies will be relatively safe from the Cuban broadcasts, which are to be powered by 150,000-watt transmitters. The most powerful transmitter the Federal Communications Commission allows an American station is 50,000 watts.

Castro already has one such transmitter in operation, at 610 on the dial, and it is interfering with everything from 550 to 680. Listeners to WNBC, in New York City, at 660 on the dial, frequently get a background of Spanish chatter. Castro's other five stations, not yet fully in operation, are planned for other strategic dial-points. To American broadcasters the whole thing is another missile crisis. • There is, of course, an international agreement signed by 20 countries (Cuba among them) around 1950. Signers agreed not to use each others' frequencies, to limit power so that stations wouldn't interfere with each other, etc. Castro is ignoring all this on the grounds that HIS government never signed the document.

Certain broadcasters feel that Castro is doing this for two reasons: (1) Just to bug the United States and get some sort of ransom for stopping it. (2) In retaliation for Voice of America broadcasts beamed at Cuba. In answer to the latter, the FCC told this column that while the VOA and two Miami-based stations do broadcast to Cuba, they do not do it on frequencies that interfere with Cuban stations. • "In fact," an FCC spokesman said, "we recently caught a Cuban exile broadcasting illegally from the U.S., beaming his stuff Castro's way. He was fined \$250 and given 30 days in jail."

When the first 150,000-watt Castro station went into operation the FCC issued a statement saying it was going to do something about it. That was about two months ago and American broadcasters are getting not only impatient, but more and more apprehensive. The FCC told me that it hopes to "bring international pressure to bear." • If this maneuver is as successful as our other efforts to control Castro, then the outlook is grim. In the meantime, the FCC recently turned down one American station that wanted to increase its power (to all of 1000 watts!) because then it might interfere with a Cuban station on a nearby frequency.

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