

Nessen Says Jack Anderson 'Conned' Ford

By LES BROWN

Ron Nessen, White House press secretary, said he and President Ford had been "conned" into giving Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, a 30-minute television interview with the President without having it made clear in the beginning that Mr. Anderson had no prearranged agreement for the program to be shown or that the interview was "being done on spec" (speculation).

All the networks, including the Public Broadcasting Service, have rejected the program, in which the President and Mr. Anderson talk about the American Bicentennial.

Mr. Nessen, reached yesterday in Helsinki, where he was traveling with the President, said: "I am mad, but not at the networks. I'm mad at Jack Anderson."

Excoriates Networks

He said that when Mr. Anderson had asked for the interview, he seemed to indicate that the program had a ready market, tied in somehow with the campaign for a Bicentennial slogan that was being conducted in the Anderson column.

The networks turned the program down chiefly because their policies require news programs to be conducted by their own newsmen. Some were also concerned with the possible equal time complications if the

President, an announced candidate, were to receive special air time in an election season.

A spokesman for the Public Broadcasting Service said the interview had been rejected "because we didn't see any news value in it." He said it seemed to be little more than a "puff piece" for Mr. Anderson's slogan campaign.

After the program was turned down, Mr. Anderson wrote a newspaper column excoriating the networks, saying "their treatment of Ford's patriotic comments can only diminish the standing of the free press in America." 28 JUL

Of the networks' policies, he said that apparently "it's not so much the President's answers that matter; it's who asks the questions."

Yesterday, Mr. Anderson said, he was unaware of the network's prohibition against the use of outside journalism and indicated that he had at first believed the program would play on ABC-TV, the network with which he is associated as a contributor on "A.M. America."

He said "A.M. America" had been interested in the interview with President Ford but was overruled by "top brass" in the company.

Attempts were then made to place it on the other networks, with the air time to be purchased by Edward Pizek, the founder of Mrs. Paul's Kitchens, a frozen foods company.

"In my innocence, I thought the networks would be delighted to have the program," Mr. Anderson said. "It didn't remotely occur to me that there would be any problem getting a Bicentennial program with the President on the networks, especially then there was a sponsor for it."

The person who overruled the producers of "A.M. America" was William Sheehan, president of ABC News, who said he had made the decision and advised Mr. Anderson of it before the interview was filmed.

"We maintain a vast news-gathering organization, which includes several White House reporters, and there would be no sense in farming out something like this to the outside," Mr. Sheehan said.

He went on: "People come in and think they can make a buck with something they've filmed, while our own news division operates at a deficit." He said the offer to pay for the time was of no matter, because "we wouldn't make a commercial venture of an interview with the President."

A spokesman for Newsgroup, a small Washington-based company that produced the program for Mr. Anderson, said his company had decided how to consume the expense of filming — estimated between \$3,500 and \$5,000 — and to give the program away free to

the television organization "that would give it the widest exposure."

The spokesman said there had been requests for it from a number of public television stations, after Mr. Anderson's Monday column, which scored the network's policies.

The story was worth telling, Mr. Anderson wrote on that "as evidence of the tight control a few network czars exercise over the TV channels."

The columnist attacked the Public Broadcasting Service for rejecting the program because it contained no hard news, when it regularly features programs on book reviews, yoga, cooking and chess.

"The taxpayers are doling out \$46.4-million to public-television stations this fiscal year, plus another \$9-million for facilities, plus additional funds for specific television shows," he wrote. "Yet P.B.S. refused to present, at no cost to the taxpayers, the President talking about the greatness of America."

In a telephone interview, Mr. Anderson said: "This was not a news program. If it were, I would have done a better job of interviewing."

"Gerald Ford and I do not agree on politics," he went on. "The whole point of the program was to show that the President and a critic—a muck-raker like me—can discuss the greatness of America."

Mr. Nessen said, he had learned that the program was being done on speculation the night before the interview. He said he had been told by Robert Mead, the White House television adviser.

Mr. Nessen related that at the beginning of the interview, President Ford asked Mr. Anderson when the program would be on television. He received an inconclusive answer.

When the interview was completed, Mr. Nessen informed the President that it had been made on "spec."

Mr. Ford shrugged and said it was worthwhile anyway.

In Helsinki yesterday, Mr. Nessen said: "I still think we've been had. I think we got conned."

D. J. ...