

NETWORKS WEIGH USING NIXON TAPES

Profanity May Be Problem
if Committee Plays Them

By LES BROWN

The possibility that some of the White House tapes may be played at the open sessions of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings raises the uneasy question at the networks of whether they should be broadcast on national television — profanity, ethnic characterizations and all.

Richard S. Salant, president of CBS News, has said it would present a "very difficult decision," adding that if the networks decided to censor any of the language the public might not be presented the complete case.

The question could be academic, however, since an aide to the committee chairman indicated that present plans called for the 18 tapes on hand to be played in the closed sessions, and not publicly. Francis O'Brien, administrative assistant to Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, said yesterday that "as of now—Day One of the hearings—we don't expect to play any of the tapes in the open sessions, but it could happen."

Mr. O'Brien said, "We have all the equipment needed for the tapes to be broadcast, although, if they were played, the members of the committee would listen to them with ear-

phones." He observed that they could be played for the committee in that manner and be broadcast simultaneously.

Careful Study Expected

Richard C. Wald, president of NBC News, and William Sheehan, senior vice president of ABC News, said that since their commitment had been to cover the hearings in full, they would be inclined to air the tapes without deleting the expletives, unless the obscenity laws dictated censorship. Each suggested that the question would have to be considered carefully.

There is some precedent for broadcasting unexpurgated audio tapes on television. When WNET Channel 13 carried the Knapp Commission hearings on police corruption two years ago, all the profanity on the tape recordings went out over the air. Since the tapes were not of broadcast quality, unedited transcripts were presented simultaneously on the screen.

It may be that the White House tapes are technically unsuitable for broadcasting, even if they should be introduced in open session. "We've heard that they're barely audible, and make for very hard listening," said Frank J. Jordan, Washington bureau chief for NBC News. "They may not have the kind of fidelity for television use."

Sanford Socolow, Mr. Jordan's counterpart at CBS News, said that it was his impression, from preliminary arrangements with the committee, that the networks would be excluded from any playing of the tapes but would be provided with verbatim transcripts. If that should happen, the question merely changes to one of how the networks would deal with the transcripts—whether they will read the straight or with their own deletion of expletives.