

Networks to Take Turns With Watergate Coverage

New York

The three major networks announced yesterday that for the first time in television history they will rotate live coverage of a major news event — the Watergate hearings.

Executives drew lots and, following the result, NBC will carry the Senate hearings live when they resume on June 5, CBS on June 6, and ABC on June 7.

The three networks have been besieged by protests from viewers, saying they have been deprived of their favorite daytime soap operas and game shows.

Some women have said that regularly scheduled programs, pre-empted for live coverage of the Senate hearings, kept them company while doing housework,

but that Watergate was no company at all.

The new plan means that, on any one day of the hearings, one channel will be carrying Watergate while the other two will have their regular programs.

However, network officials stressed that the rotation system does not preclude either or both of the other networks' broadcasting the hearings on a day when it is not their scheduled assignment.

"You can be sure we'll all be on when former Attorney General John N. Mitchell testifies," said one official.

ABC said phone calls were running 10 to 1 against continued live coverage of the hearings.

CBS said it has received 1000 calls, of which only 50

approved the pre-empting of regular programming to show the Watergate hearings.

NBC said that it received 961 calls on Thursday, complaining about pre-empting favorite shows to broadcast the hearings.

All three networks said that the rotation system is experimental and could be terminated at the request of any network at the end of any hearing week.

The arrangement, they said, will not affect special programs, news reports and other programming based on the hearings.

Moreover, any individual station desiring to carry the hearings may do so whether affiliated with the network broadcasting them that particular day or not.

Since the hearings started, coverage has been on a pool basis, which means that it was identical on each network except when interrupted for commentary by a network's own correspondent.

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