

NIXON SOVIET TRIP A PROBLEM FOR TV

Could Overlap Coverage of
Impeachment Hearings

By LES BROWN

President Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union late this month, which is likely to receive substantial live television coverage in the United States, may overlap the single portion of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings open to television cameras.

If that should occur, network news officials have observed, there might be the odd juxtaposition of impeachment hearings on one network and the President in Moscow concurrently on the other two.

Under the rotating plan agreed to by ABC, CBS and NBC, one of the three, in turn, would be responsible for carrying the hearings each day. The others would exercise their own news judgment on whether to carry it simultaneously or present regular programming. The substantive significance of each day's session of the hearings would determine whether there would be singular or multiple coverage, according to the new executives.

President Nixon's arrival in Moscow is scheduled for June 27. The phases of the Judiciary Committee's hearings open to television would begin a few days earlier, or possibly the preceding week, according to an unofficial agenda of the committee.

An aide to the panel's chairman, Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, said

yesterday that the sessions that might be open—those involving the testimony of witnesses, the committee's subsequent debate and possibly also the voting by the 38 members—would not begin until the latter part of June because of the committee's decision to conduct the entire phase on evidence in closed sessions. Since Mr. Rodino still intends to conclude the hearings by mid-July, the aide said, that would leave television with two or three weeks of access.

Some network officials have begun to doubt that television will have even that much access to the Rodino hearings, after they were initially given to expect some two months'

worth of coverage. They cite the swirl of questions that still trouble the committee regarding television coverage. Those include concern that confidential material may be interlaced with the public material presented to the committee and that the televising of witnesses who are under indictment may be prejudicial to their forthcoming trials.

Furthermore, they observe, the final debate and voting on the articles of impeachment to be recommended to the House of Representatives will be held as a committee meeting, which would be closed to television unless the 38 members vote

unanimously to allow coverage.

Considering such a vote unlikely, certain network news officials now believe that television access to the hearings will be scant and sporadic. One news division chief said he expected television coverage to be only "an in-and-out thing, limited to an occasional session of a token nature."

Representatives of all three networks have complained that the information from the Rodino committee on what they may cover and when has been hazy and tentative. "It is an ad hoc committee whose members make up their minds as they go along," one said.