Assignment TV
By TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY

(Terrence O'Flaherty wrote this column before the AFTRA strike against the major networks was settled Monday.)

One day a few weeks ago I walked, by chance, into the studio of one of San Francisco's top radio stations and saw a "newsman" reading the newscast from the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle . . . And not long afterward, when the San Francisco television stations used to sign off with a voice-only newscast, I heard with my own ears another "newsman" begin a news roundup by saying "Out in San Francisco tonight . . ."

I recall these two incidents as examples of announcers who are masquerading as newsmen. They neither gathered the news nor did they write it. The TV announcer didn't even have the brains to do a good job of cheating by rewriting the opening to say "HERE in San Francisco tonight." He merely ripped a piece of wire copy out of the teletype machine and read it. This has a direct bearing on the strike of the network radio and TV news personnel.

THE comparatively few TV newsmen who write what they read do not like to be confused with the "rip-and-read" newscasters. They take pride in being craftsmen with words. This is admirable in as much as it is difficult for anyone outside the newsroom to tell the difference and I have a hunch the average viewer doesn't care. Even more truthfully, he probably never thought a newscaster wrote anything anyway.

This is where the newsman is different from the newscaster. The newsman gets the news and writes it; the newscaster casts it forth over the air. But the third man in this team is the newsman who assembles and composes the news but does not voice it. In the complex network news-gathering departments there are over a hundred such men who work with their heads and their pencils. They must be satisfied with hearing their words mouthed by others. They are the scriptwriters; the newscasters are the actors. These are the frustrated ones.

Chet Huntley and David Brinkley both write and read their own material. Walter Cronkite is also billed as the "managing editor" of his newscast. The personal touch is most evident in Brinkley's work while the other two are less concerned with style than straight reporting.

THE QUESTION of which is mightier, the pen or the microphone, was settled long ago within the network newsrooms. Union representation is another matter entirely and it has become commonplace for TV newsmen to carry two cards—one in WGA (Writers Guild of America) when they write and another in AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, when they appear on camera.

Chet Huntley's decision not to heed the AFTRA strike call is based on his feeling that the real TV newsmen-writers should have their own craft union like newspaper reporters and stay out of AFTRA which lumps actors, jugglers, singers, newsmen, announcers and disc jockeys in one big industrial union.

The top newsmen were not directly concerned. In addition to Huntley, Frank McGee, Ray Scherer and Morgan Beaty were at work. In NBC, for example, all network "correspondents" have individual contracts and there has never been a collective bargaining agreement in effect covering their work as newsmen or commentators. NBC claims AFTRA cannot force the network to take any action against returning newsmen. AFTRA executives claim they can "discipline, fine or expel members" who displease them.

Meanwhile, back at the networks, they're pocketing more money by re-running old programs and not having to pay newsmen. And that's where the matter lies. That's what's news in news.

Board to Meet

The board of the Southern California Regional Occupational Center will convene at 7:30 p.m. today for its regular meeting. The session will be held in the administrative offices of the Torrance Unified School District, 2335 Plaza del Amo.

TRW Executive Guest Speaker

Charles R. Allen, vice-president and chief financial officer of TRW, Inc., will address members of the Southwest Los Angeles Chapter of the National Accountants Association next Monday.

Allen will discuss "Financial Aspects of Doing Business Abroad" at a meeting to be held at Lococo's Restaurant in Manhattan Beach.

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