

The problems of regulation are complex. The broadcasting industry has become increasingly frightened by the impact that cable television will have on its markets. The broadcasters argue that CATV, by transmitting both local and distant network signals to its subscribers, will destroy their advertising markets, although no such adverse effects have been found in areas where cable companies are already in operation. They also fear that if cable companies produce their own sponsored programmes, they will attempt to limit the other commercial channels they carry and set excessive rates on public service programming in order to concentrate their market.

Public interest groups are also afraid that cable companies will have too much control over the programming on non-network channels and would limit access to the media. The American Civil Liberties Union and other groups have suggested that cable companies should be limited to common carrier functions, with no control over programming and with rate structures approved by the federal government. Their function would then be similar to that of the telephone company, simply to provide the facilities for all future cable services to any individual, company or organization that wishes to use them. (The New York City franchises attempt to guarantee such freedom of access, but the ACLU argued that since the initial rate structure is to be set by the companies and since there are only to be four public channels for the foreseeable future, the demand will be greater than the supply, so that the companies will be tempted simply to lease time to the highest bidder.)

These and other important issues, such as the preservation of individual privacy, are but some of the problems that must shortly be faced. An FCC recommendation filed this week seems to imply that the commission is finally prepared to claim final jurisdiction over cable operations. The FCC may well rule that New York City has no legal right to regulate cable television through the granting of franchises. David I. Kraushaar, the FCC hearing examiner, wrote that "essentially, the franchises issued by municipalities in the state appear by present New York law to be merely authorizations for the use of city streets". He noted that any cable operator could install a cable system in New York City by leasing lines from the telephone company, as Comtel Inc., an unlicensed, unfranchised company, is already doing.

Mr Kraushaar also pointed out that Federal Court decisions had declared unconstitutional attempts by cities to regulate CATV operators by imposing gross receipt taxes. This is exactly what the city has done in the two franchise agreements. The two cable companies have agreed to pay the city from 5 to 25 per cent of their gross receipts.

Mayor Lindsay noted these arguments but stated that the recommendations had been analysed and that they "concluded that the recommended FCC action was unsound and legally irrelevant to the board's decision on whether to approve the proposed franchise contracts". The recommendations have the force of a ruling unless there is an appeal within 30 days. Following the appeal period the matter goes to the FCC review board and thence to the commissioners. If the commission upholds the recommendations, it could well be a first step towards general federal control over the development and regulation of CATV companies.

Miscellaneous Intelligence

VIEW from the top of the bandwagon, expressed during last week's Congressional committee hearings on the affairs of the Smithsonian Institution:

Dr Dillon Ripley (Secretary of the Smithsonian): "I am reminded of the statement of the chairman of the President's Council on the Environment recently, that most government agencies are now trying to get onto the environmental bandwagon. I was able to reassure him that the Smithsonian has been there all along."

Mr. Frank Thompson (chairman of the House Subcommittee): "Most members of Congress are trying to get onto it also."

On the whole, the bandwagon's rate of progress is what might be expected from a vehicle so overloaded.

IN the United States Department of Commerce it never rains, it precipitates. In fact a department booklet designed to explain in everyday language the meteorologist's use of probabilistic statements is even entitled "Precipitation Probability Forecasts". The department is clearly inhabited by miserable souls who don't like walking in the precipitation, whose hearts never light up at seeing a precipitation-bow in the sky, and who Calvinistically believe that the precipitation precipitates on the just and unjust alike.

THE average score on IQ tests of recruits to the New York police force last year was 98.2, with one of the four classes averaging 93.2. The New York City personnel department should not worry too greatly; the average IQ of scientists at Cambridge, England, is only 125 (*J. Biosocial Science*, 2, 1; 1970).

MANY people have earned some useful pocket money by donating a pint of blood, but few have been able to retire on the strength of their haematocrits. This is the happy circumstance of Mr Joe Thomas, a Detroit assembly line worker, who is leaving his job to earn \$12,000 a year from selling his blood to the American Hospital Supply Company of Dade, Florida. His blood, which contains the rare antibody anti-Lewis B, fetches \$1,500 a quart.

DEALERS who tried to make antiques out of the early generations of computers were disappointed last week when the world's first computer auction at the Parke-Bernet galleries in New York grossed less than \$300,000. A \$2 million IBM 7094 system drew no bids, even at \$15,000, while the control panel of a Univac I, the first commercial computer which was launched by the Sperry Rand Corporation in 1956, made only \$110. The technetronic revolution, to use a present catch phrase, may be progressing apace, but not as fast as some people imagine.

THE brain drain to the United States from the rest of the world is said to be diminishing, but the news has yet to reach Congressman Miller of Ohio, who last week told the House of Representatives: "Today we should take note of America's great accomplishments and in so doing renew our faith and confidence in ourselves as individuals and as a nation. The number of engineers and scientists coming to the United States from other nations increased from 5,345 in 1965 to 12,973 in 1968."