

The Washington merry-go-round

Spent 11/7/70
Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON — We have gotten ourselves into another brouhaha with International Telephone and Telegraph.

This has caused the State Department to seek a criminal investigation of the multinational, multibillion-dollar conglomerate.

On October 2, we reported that ITT had placed a bugging expert inside the late President Salvador Allende's palace in Chile. Our story was based on ITT evidence, which escaped the shredder and was slipped to my associate Les Whitten on a downtown Washington street corner.

Whitten double-checked the facts in the documents and then called ITT for comment. Without waiting for the story to appear, ITT's press chief Robert Sykes wired denials to many of our client papers.

Let's try to sort out the facts. In 1971, ITT plotted with the Central Intelligence Agency to keep Allende out of office. When this failed, the conglomerate tried to bring about Chile's economic collapse, hoping it would trigger a military coup.

We reported that ITT had conspired with Chilean militarists. Sykes objected that the CIA, not ITT, had done the plotting. This was followed by a shamefaced second wire from Sykes, retracting the charge against the CIA and laying the blame instead upon "unidentified persons."

ITT was in the midst of its skulduggery against Allende in 1971 when it quietly dispatched John Ragan, a master bugging technician, to Chile with a load of electronic gear.

ITT has now come up with the astonishing explanation that Ragan was supposed to help Allende de-bug his palace and two residences.

This would have been an odd mission, to say the least, for ITT to undertake while it was trying to foment a military uprising against Allende. Some might even suspect that ITT had hired the electronic expert to plant bugs rather than remove them.

As for us, we reported only what we could prove. We wrote that Ragan had gained access to the presidential premises, whether to bug or to de-bug we did not say.

Sykes, meanwhile, claimed that Ragan had been sent to Chile by ITT "at Dr. Allende's request." Fine, we said. Show us a copy of the request with Allende's signature.

ITT backed down again. It was not really Allende, said the company, but an unidentified aide who had requested the bugging expert.

We got into another hassle with ITT by

insisting upon a certified signature. "Ridiculous," protested the company.

Ridiculous? A few days later, The New York Times accused ITT of chemically altering vital documents in a \$12 million suit, a charge that the conglomerate was obliged to admit.

In flying the bugging equipment to Chile, we have now learned, ITT failed to get a State Department license. Bugging equipment suitable for military use requires a license, subject to a fine of \$25,000 and two years in jail.

In its own letters, ITT has conceded that "offensive bugs" — in other words devices used for bugging rather than de-bugging — were "taken to Chile by Ragan." In Chile, according to these documents, "Ragan worked with the army and police."

Ragan has also acknowledged that bugging equipment was left in Chile for army and police use. Clearly, therefore, the bugs were suitable for military use. After we pointed this out, the State Department asked for a criminal investigation of ITT.

By leaving New York with the equipment, ITT may have violated another criminal law, even though certain exemptions are allowed for "common carriers" like ITT. If the bugs were not used by ITT in the "normal course of business," ITT officials could be subject to another \$10,000 fine and five years in jail.

In its hurry to deny everything, ITT also denied making "approaches of any kind whatsoever to the Chilean military at any time." This conflicts with an ITT admission that its master bugging consultant Ragan was in contact with the Chilean military.

Indeed, Ragan's own secret notes on his meetings in Chile gave the coded names of military officers he met.

Another confidential document describes how Ragan, while on a contractual basis with the Republican National Committee, received a

telephone call from an ex-FBI associate, Russ Tagliareni.

Tagliareni happens to be ITT's assistant security director. Together, Tagliareni and Ragan flew to Chile, according to the document, as part of Ragan's 11-day mission. Ragan "received \$200 a day for his duties," and at one point actually met Allende, adds the document.

These are some of the facts that ITT has neglected to mention in the denials it has been firing around the country. In the past, ITT has dissembled about the famous Dita Beard memo, shredded documents to destroy evidence and misled the Congress in testimony.

Before the evidence disappears on the Chile mission, we suggest it should be subpoenaed.