

ON THE RECORD so far at least, the administration has not done anything very wrong in its dealings with the International Telephone and Telegraph Company.

But Macbeth himself never started more guiltily than the President and his men. And the interesting question is why.

The major charge against the administration involves the settlement made inside the Justice Department of a pending court action against ITT's acquisition of the Hartford Fire Insurance Co. Richard McLaren, the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the antitrust division at the time, wanted to take the matter to the Supreme Court, and he had a case — the case against bigness.

But the case was not overwhelming. While big, ITT has dominant market power only in the communications field which is government-regulated. It would not have dominated the insurance field. As Solicitor General Erwin Griswold pointed out at the time, the government might well have lost the case in the Supreme Court — particularly given the present complexion of the Court.

SO IT WAS REASONABLE for the White House and John Mitchell, the Attorney General at the time, and Richard Kleindienst, the Deputy Attorney General at the time, to discuss the case with ITT officials. It was within their area of discretion to overrule Mr. McLaren, and decide to settle out of court, particularly when they forced some important divestitures on ITT. Certainly no serious person could believe the charge that such a decision—a decision involving billions of dollars—would be determined by the several hundred thousand dollars anted up by an ITT subsidiary to bring the Republican convention to San Diego.

The second big charge is that ITT influenced the administration to take steps designed to prevent the accession of Salvador Allende, Chile's Marxist president, after his election in Septem-

ber 1970. It is clear that ITT, with a big investment in a Chilean telephone company bound to go down the drain if Senor Allende became president, did try to push the administration in that direction.

Its officials were in touch with the White House, the State Department, and Ambassador Edward Korry in Santiago. They were also in touch with officials at the Central Intelligence Agency, and they seem to have found a sympathetic reception among at least some low-level operatives at the sneaker factory. ITT is not a very nice company.

But the administration rejected the ITT plan for provoking trouble and a military intervention in Chile.

I was in Chile just after Senor Allende was seated as president. At the time I was in touch with several ITT officials, including Hal Hendrix of the company's Latin American operation, William Merriam of the Washington office, and Vice President Edward Gerrity of the home office in New York. They made it plain that their advice and counsel had received scant official attention. They were not pleased at all with the White House, The State Department, Ambassador Korry or the CIA.

GIVEN THAT RECORD, the administration could have stood its ground firmly with a straightforward account of what happened.

Peter Flanigan of the White House staff had a report whipped up to make it seem that Mr. McLaren, instead of bowing to superior authority, had come to see the case differently. Mr. Kleindienst denied meeting the ITT official with whom he actually worked out the settlement. The White House, presumably under the spur of the President himself, put out all kinds of reports aimed at discrediting the original source of the charges, the columnist Jack Anderson.

One explanation for this curious behavior is that there really is an inner guilt—a deeper fix the administration is trying to cover up. Maybe so. But that

suspicion awaits much more evidence than anybody has yet produced.

My own impression is quite different. My own impression is that the men in the Nixon administration are essentially novices in government, little used to working with each other.

On top of that the Nixon men are truly paranoid about the press.

If this interpretation is correct, we are never going to get to the bottom of the ITT case with its miasma of phony issues, artful dodges, false leads and plain trivia. The best we can hope for is that, in time, the Nixon administration, having become less amateurish and jittery, will learn the art of government.

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Curious ITT Jitters