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In March and April of 1972, when Watergate was a household word only to those who lived there, the big issue was a suspicious coziness between the Nixon Administration and the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. From this relationship came the dropping of an antitrust action against the mighty conglomerate and a convenient commitment of as much as \$400,000 from I.T.T. to help pay for the Republican National Convention.

The amount of money involved may seem paltry when compared with the mountains of unexplained cash now revealed as floating around President Nixon's re-election campaign, for purposes perhaps more devious. But the questions raised in the I.T.T. case, the suspicions of improper Government dealings with large businesses are still unanswered. Indeed, I.T.T. stands as only one expression of a policy and mode of operation now revealed as pervasive throughout the Nixon Administration.

The big question seventeen months ago was why Richard G. McLaren, then Assistant Attorney General for antitrust matters, had decided not to press the action against I.T.T. to the Supreme Court, after having earlier shown eagerness to do so. Now, through a secret White House account surfaced before the Senate Watergate hearings, comes a picture of the pressures brought to bear on Mr. McLaren to let the corporation off the hook.

Back in 1970 I.T.T.'s president, Harold S. Geneen, was meeting over Mr. McLaren's head with Attorney General John N. Mitchell and John D. Ehrlichman at the White House. Then came a flow of memoranda, one from Mr. Ehrlichman referring to an "understanding" with Mr. Geneen and complaining about Mr. McLaren's actions. Mr. McLaren was told he could get "more specified guidance" from Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell was reminded that he and President Nixon had already discussed the "agreed-upon ends" in resolving the I.T.T. case. Mr. Ehrlichman asked the Attorney General at one point if the White House "would work directly" with Mr. McLaren, or through Mr. Mitchell. Peter G. Peterson, then Presidential assistant for foreign economic policy and Treasury Secretary John Connally were reportedly involved in the efforts to halt the case; so was Vice President Agnew.

The author of the newly published memo, Charles W. Colson, promptly tried to minimize it, saying he was merely laying out a "devil's advocate" position, presenting the inner dealings of the I.T.T. affair in "their worst context." In this he succeeded; the context makes the Administration look far worse than most observers were willing to judge at the time.

It is only right that the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, has taken the whole I.T.T. matter into his jurisdiction. It is another outcropping of law-stretching of a kind which seems to have become routine in Mr. Nixon's Presidency. Whatever the specific culpability for the Watergate burglary and the subsequent cover-up, it is plain that the story does not end there. The country still needs all the facts on trusting of laws for political ends.