

Political Justice? *NY Times* 15 Mar 72

The listing by the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation of those Government officials with whom Harold S. Geneen, the company's president, met during the litigation of the company's antitrust suits is a roster of power in Washington. It includes Cabinet officers and White House advisers. Among them was John Mitchell, then the Attorney General.

The statement, which was issued on the eve of Mr. Geneen's appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday, properly insisted on his Constitutional right as an American citizen "to place his view before any and all members of the Government involved in national policy."

This right is not at issue. Although not every citizen has such ready access to official power, business executives certainly have the right of any citizen to discuss with Government officials issues affecting their company's operations.

The real issue can be simply stated: has the Government's power been used to grant favors to a corporation in return for a promise—express or implied—of a political contribution? Have the highest officials of the Justice Department allowed politics to interfere with their law-enforcement duties?

These facts are beyond dispute in the I.T.T. case. The giant corporation was involved in the litigation of three antitrust suits; it attained a more favorable settlement than competent Justice Department officials in charge of the case had initially indicated; during the same period I.T.T. pledged a contribution of at least \$100,000 through a subsidiary to help finance the 1972 Republican National Convention.

There is no proof to date that these facts are interconnected. The veracity of a lobbyist's memorandum establishing such a connection has been denied by I.T.T. and the Justice Department. Mr. Mitchell testified yesterday that in the course of two meetings with Mr. Geneen he discussed only the over-all policies of his department toward conglomerates but not the I.T.T. litigation.

Judgment must be suspended as to whether the transactions involve actual violations of law. What the case has already shown, however, is erosion of Governmental credibility, as the wall between law-enforcement and politics crumbles. Credibility is strained when those who manage both justice and politics deny that they have been listening to voices of conflicting interests.

The politicizing of the Justice Department has been a dismal trend, engaged in by both parties for more than a generation. It is precisely because this course has been unchallenged by the Democrats and Republicans alike that sometimes even the most important officials become morally blind to its consequences.

The result is a contagion of cynicism about the system and its institutions. When Government creates conditions which make it easy to abuse power, its citizens begin to condone corruption as a way of life. Such attitudes, particularly when they involve the Justice Department, subvert faith in Government by law.

Corporations should stand at arm's length from political parties; the Justice Department should not be run by politicians. The fact that both these injunctions have been ignored in American *Realpolitik* for many years does not make the present situation as between I.T.T. and G.O.P. look one bit cleaner.