

World of Books



'The Sovereign State of ITT'

William Hogan

AT ONE POINT in "The Sovereign State of ITT," by the British journalist Anthony Sampson, the cast of characters is oddly familiar. It includes John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Dean, Richard Kleindienst, Senator Sam Ervin and a Senate investigating committee. The President is in the background worrying about how the results of this particular administration crisis will affect the forthcoming election.

This Senate committee, in 1972, was investigating whether Justice Department officials had dropped an antitrust suit against the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. in return for a \$400,000 contribution by that multi-national conglomerate to help underwrite the GOP convention, then set for San Diego. This was the case in which Dita Beard, ITT's tough, efficient lobbyist, surfaced in Jack Anderson's column as an indiscreet memo-writer who almost gave ITT a corporate coronary.

★ ★ ★

FASCINATING as Sampson's recapitulation of this running news story is, it is only a part of an overall analysis of ITT. Reading like a book-length Jack Anderson column, it is anything but a sympathetic view of ITT and its chief officer, Harold Geneen, who the author shows as running his 400,000-man empire in buccaneer fashion, a virtual corporate nation in itself.

ITT, we find, was established in 1920 and named to confuse it with the already big AT&T which operated telephones inside the U.S. (the confusion remains). It had a special relationship with the Third Reich, the British author shows, when its Virgin Islands-born founder, one Sosthenes Behn, worked closely with German companies and the Nazi government from the early 1930s through the war.

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SAMPSON offers a detailed account of ITT's men in Chile working to stop the election of Marxist President Salvador Allende and seeking to enlist CIA assistance to create economic chaos in Chile and to encourage a military coup. (The CIA was not particularly necessary, the author suggests, as ITT's own intelligence apparatus in South America was far more effective.)

While a little shrill, at times almost breathless, in getting all of ITT's alleged sins down on paper, "The Sovereign State of ITT" does read like a fiction thriller in which intrigues, shredded documents, private airplanes, control of personalities and careers both corporate and political, and a company foreign policy of its very own are all a part of the show.

As a reader, I found it less an "expose" than gee-whiz entertainment. But that's the way things tend to be in our time (Stein & Day; \$10).