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Editorials

The ITT Role in Foreign Policy

THE SENATE HEARINGS into the ITT's role in the 1970 presidential politics of Chile are now at the end of their first phase, and all concerned — including excited Chilean Allendistas — can draw breath. Many Americans who have been following the tale of a multinational corporation's wheeling and dealing in a Latin republic may well have reached the conclusion that when it comes to the conduct of the international relations of the United States, the top level tycoons of American industry should leave them to Richard M. Nixon, the State Department and the CIA, by whom they will be handled a great deal more skillfully and with appropriate restraint. The multinational corporation approach to foreign relations is not at all reassuring.

Chairman Harold S. Geneen of ITT wound up the Church subcommittee hearing on Monday with testimony about having twice offered the U.S. government large sums of money — “up to a million dollars”, it has been said — to block Dr. Salvador Allende from taking power. He couldn't recall having made this offer in July 1970 to the CIA's top man in Latin America, but since the CIA man, William V. Broe, had already told the committee that, sure enough, Geneen had made the offer, Geneen accepted that testimony.

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IN THIS SHOW of corporate vagueness, and in others that have come from other officers of the company, ITT seems not to have recovered from the confusion that surrounded the Dita Beard memos of an earlier chapter of the company's relations with government.

One of the more reassuring facts that has clearly emerged before the Church subcommittee is that the CIA turned down the million-dollar offer of aid for a stop-Allende movement. That the CIA should show more discretion than ITT did will be of considerable comfort to those who believe the United States would have no business forcibly or clandestinely trying to reverse a democratic election result.

It is to be said for ITT that, like other American companies in Chile, it was under a threat by Allende to nationalize them. ITT's 70 per cent interest in the Chile Telephone Company, worth approximately \$153 million, was in jeopardy. ITT has been in Chile under a concession since 1930, and it had pride in its contribution to building the country's communications. Its attitude, expressed in memos by one of its top officers, was that “freedom is dying in Chile” (under the shadow of Allende). Thus, the ITT man felt, there was no validity in the State Department's view that Allende's election was a Chilean matter in which the U.S. should not interfere.

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“WHY,” HE ASKED, “Should the U.S. try to be so pious and sanctimonious in September and October of 1970 when over the past few years it has been pouring the taxpayers' money into Chile, admittedly to defeat Marxism? Why can't the fight be continued now that the battle is in the home-stretch and the enemy is more clearly identifiable?”

That's a straightforward enough question, but most Americans today would say, as the Nixon Administration has evidently said to itself, that the United States is no longer following its early 20th century policy of sending its own marines, or buying up local generals, to straighten out the politics of Latin countries according to Washington's liking.