



Administration Has The ITT Jitters

Joseph Kraft

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

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 Anti-Trust 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.

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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 McLaren, and decide to settle out of court, particularly when they forced some important divestitures of 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 in-

fluenced the administration to take steps designed to prevent the accession of Salvador Allende, Chile's Marxist President, after his election in September 1970. It is clear that ITT 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.

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

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GIVEN that record, the administration could have stood its ground firmly with a straightforward account of what happened. Instead, there was a Niagara of activity to cover tracks and start false hares.

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 that the men in the Nixon Administration are truly paranoid about the press. When charges are aired, however improbable, they don't even try to get a fair hearing or make a clear case. They issue blanket denials and put forward countercharges to muddy the waters.

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.