

# The Wilson Testimony

The most critical issue in the I.T.T. hearings is whether there was a cause-and-effect relationship between the firm's pledge of financial support for the Republican National Convention in San Diego and the settlement of its antitrust difficulties. Such a relationship has not been proved but neither has it been disproved. On the contrary, the efforts of various participants to knock down the idea of any connection serve mostly to strengthen rather than dispel suspicion.

That was true of the testimony yesterday of Representative Bob Wilson, the California Republican who was most instrumental in obtaining the financial pledge from the Sheraton Hotel Corporation, an I.T.T. subsidiary, which made it possible for the city of San Diego to play host to the convention. In his prepared statement, Mr. Wilson portrayed the I.T.T. contribution as merely a routine business investment to promote one of its new hotels.

In response to questions, however, Mr. Wilson contradicted the testimony of I.T.T.'s president, Harold Geneen. Although Mr. Geneen had earlier told the committee that the pledge was for only \$200,000, Mr. Wilson testified that the financial commitment could have reached \$400,000. More significantly, the Congressman testified that he had discussed the Antitrust Division's "attitude toward conglomerates" with Mr. Geneen in 1970. That means that Representative Wilson was well aware of I.T.T.'s antitrust difficulties when he approached Mr. Geneen for the critical financial backing for the convention.

In contrast, Mr. Geneen—after listing Representative Wilson as one of several influential Government officials with whom he discussed his firm's antitrust case—reversed himself and two weeks ago submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee a list of persons from which Mr. Wilson's name was omitted in this context.

Representative Wilson likewise failed to clear up the conflicts in testimony concerning the authenticity of the now famous memorandum signed by Mrs. Dita Beard, the I.T.T. lobbyist, but now repudiated in part by her. Before Mrs. Beard issued her denials, Mr. Wilson in local newspaper and television interviews in San Diego early in March suggested he had good reason to believe the memorandum was authentic.

His efforts yesterday to reconcile those interviews with Mrs. Beard's subsequent contention that the memorandum is partly fake served only to further deepen the mystery.

These ambiguities and contradictory memories may mean much or little. As of now, they chiefly signify that the Judiciary Committee has to press forward with its inquiry, hearing all relevant witnesses and obtaining every I.T.T. and Justice Department document which can shed light on the case.