

White House and Alioto

WASHINGTON — The chummy relationship between the White House and Big Business that sullied the ITT affair now appears to have also infected the continuing tribulations of San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto.

As in the ITT scandal, there is no hard evidence of real wrongdoing on the part of the White House and the Justice Department. But the similar pattern of blurred lines confusing what is political and what is judicial does raise some interesting questions.

ALIOTO, a prominent Democrat, was cleared recently by a Washington State superior court jury in a civil suit of allegedly unlawfully sharing legal fees with two former state officials. But there is still pending against him a federal indictment for bribery stemming from the same fee-splitting case, and last week he asked a U.S. District Court to dismiss those additional charges.

Alioto's brief, "without here examining the possible political motivations of the federal officials involved," included a list of meetings between Washington State and federal officials regarding the Alioto case. In a deposition State Attorney General Slade Gorton, a Republican, told of two meetings at the White House with John Ehrlichman, the President's principal domestic aide; two letters to Ehrlichman; and one meeting at the White House with Egil Krogh, an Ehrlichman assistant.

The first meeting between Gorton and Ehrlichman was held in late October or early November, 1969, shortly after Look Magazine accused Alioto of having Mafia ties. (Alioto sued, got a hung jury, and is

preparing for re-trial.) The meeting with Krogh immediately preceded the federal grand jury session last year, which produced the fee-splitting indictment against Alioto.

That fee-splitting charge arose from litigation in which Alioto, then a private attorney, won more than \$16 million in settlements for Washington utility districts from major electrical equipment manufacturers. Coincidentally, during that period Gorton was a member of the law firm that represented Federal Pacific Electric Company, one of the defendants.

According to Citizens Research Foundation, high officials of the electrical equipment industry contributed \$111,800 in 1968 to Richard Nixon and local Republican candidates. The same officials contributed \$7000 to Democratic candidates.

All of this prompts one to wonder: How much did the personal interest in the Alioto case of a man who has the President's ear reflect the fact that Alioto is a Democratic Party leader in the critically important state of California?

Was Ehrlichman's interest stimulated by the substantial political contributions made by executives of the industry involved? Would he have been so interested if the companies involved had been Democratic contributors?

AND WHAT WAS the President's chief domestic adviser doing conferring with a state attorney prosecuting a local civil action anyway? If there were no politics involved, was that a proper subject to which a key White House aide should contribute his time and thoughts?