

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 30.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

17 February 1981

The Hersh Story: Better Late Than Never

By THOMAS J. BRAY

"I can't believe it," sighs Seymour Hersh, former New York Times reporter and Pulitzer Prize winner, as he juggles one telephone inquiry after another in his Washington office. "I thought I was doing a good deed. Now everybody is after me."

Edward Korry, ambassador to Chile at the time of Marxist Salvador Allende's election to the presidency in 1970, can't believe it either. A long free-lance article by Mr. Hersh has just appeared in the Times, headlined "New Evidence Backs Ex-Envoy on His Role in Chile." It appears to be a *mea culpa* by Mr. Hersh, who in 1974 had written several Times articles linking Mr. Korry to an alleged coup to prevent Mr. Allende from taking office. Mr. Hersh views it as exonerating Mr. Korry.

The story apparently arose out of a series of conversations in which Mr. Hersh was seeking Mr. Korry's help with a new book taking a negative view of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Mr. Korry was trying to get a New York Times story setting out his view of the Chilean episode. Mr. Hersh is being bombarded with questions about his motives for the story. Mr. Korry feels he got only minimal satisfaction out of his end of things.

"I didn't need Hersh to tell the world I was innocent," he fairly shouts to an interviewer seeking his reaction to the article. "That's old news. The Church committee made it clear five years ago. I wanted Hersh to tell what really happened down there. It wasn't the CIA that got Allende—it was 500% inflation and Soviet double-dealing and the Allende government's own

corruption. But Hersh doesn't want to hear that." What the article was intended to accomplish is a little murky. It began on the front page and continued inside, filling much of six columns. "Evidence has come to light," Mr. Hersh announced in the second paragraph, "suggesting that Korry, despite his strong opposition to the Allende candidacy, was frozen out of the planning for a proposed military coup and warned the White House that it would be risking another 'Bay of Pigs' if it got involved in military plots to stop Dr. Allende's election."

The article goes on to note Mr. Korry's "particular bitterness toward The New York Times," but then things begin to get a little fuzzy. The much-touted "new evidence" never quite seems to surface, despite references to classified documents,

unnamed CIA sources and interviews with "White House officials." And in any case, the central fact of the case—that Mr. Korry knew nothing about a coup—wasn't exactly new. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence—the so-called Church committee—had concluded as much years earlier in a public report on the Chile affair.

Mr. Hersh also asserts that his new materials "raise new questions about the extent of CIA operations in Chile in 1970 and the efficacy of later congressional investigations of that affair. Again, however, hard facts seem scarce, except for the apparently new—and brief—revelation that two CIA agents had entered Chile and were posing as, respectively, a Mafioso and a

foundation official. Hardly the stuff of 3,000-word articles in the Times.

So the questions remain. Why did Mr. Hersh write the story, and why did the Times print it?

Contacted by the Journal, Mr. Korry recounts events from his perspective. In mid-November he was contacted by Mr. Hersh seeking help on his book about Mr. Kissinger. Mr. Hersh told Mr. Korry that he had changed his mind about the latter's role in Chile. "I can't undo what went before," Mr. Korry recalls Mr. Hersh as saying, "but I can make it clear that you did not know" of the coup plotting. How he could make it clear wasn't stated, though Mr. Hersh, who accepts Mr. Korry's version up to this point, denies that he was offering any sort of *quid pro quo*.

"That wouldn't be ethical and I wouldn't do it," says Mr. Hersh. Besides, he adds, Mr. Korry's help on his book wasn't that vital. "I already had stuff he didn't even know about—a CIA agent pistol-whipping a Chilean general, more money than anybody realizes, Mafioso, black-marketing."

And Mr. Korry agrees that it was he, not Mr. Hersh, who actually suggested calling the Times. Mr. Hersh says he talked with A.M. Rosenthal, the executive editor, who commissioned a story. "He felt that if we had screwed Korry on page one, we should correct it on page one," recalls Mr. Hersh. (Mr. Rosenthal also adds that he had no knowledge of any "deal" between

"Until Hersh decided he needed help on his book, I was in permanent purgatory," he says.

Mr. Hersh wrote his article and submitted it to the Times in December. Between then and Feb. 9 when it ran—held up, Mr. Hersh says, for rewriting and the Iran hostage story—Mr. Korry says Mr. Hersh called him numerous times seeking more information for his book. "He was sucking it out of me," Mr. Korry claims. Not so, says Mr. Hersh, who repeats that he didn't really need information from Mr. Korry and claims Mr. Korry was over-suspicious about the delay on the story.

Mr. Korry now teaches a course in international relations at Connecticut College but has spent much of the last decade in embittered semi-retirement—angry at the press for their treatment of him, furious at what he feels was Nixon administration duplicity in going behind his back in Chile. Most of all he resents what he believes is a deliberate effort, starting with the Church committee and continuing with Mr. Hersh, to distort what actually happened in Chile. Mr. Hersh's long "correction" will only serve to cover up the real truth, he feels.

Mr. Hersh seems surprised that anybody would question his intentions. His Times article was motivated by access to new information and a desire to right a wrong, he says. "Ed Korry can't believe that some things happen just because they happen," says the hard-bitten investigative reporter, who calls himself a "skeptic" when it comes to the motives of others.

Only one thing is really clear: It is news fit to print that Seymour Hersh now believes what even the Church committee conceded years ago about Mr. Korry.

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