

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 356

NATION
1 APRIL 1978

ITT, Equal Justice and Chile

On the very last day it was legally possible to do so the Department of Justice has brought charges of lying and obstructing justice against two officials of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. One day more and the statute of limitations would have barred the prosecutions. We are told that one reason why it took so long to bring these subordinate ITT men to book was that innumerable pages of classified CIA records had to be ploughed through in order to make the cases against them.

The CIA connection is, of course, the vital one. It is known and thoroughly established that ITT, a giant American corporation with large interests in Chile, operated in the closest cahoots with the Central Intelligence Agency to prevent Salvador Allende from ever taking the office he had won in a free election. The two ITT men, whose names are hardly worth recording (Gerrity and Berrellez), are now at last charged with repeatedly lying to a Senate committee when they denied that they had done anything to try to stop Allende from assuming the Presidency in 1970.

The striking thing about this legal action is the omission of two names—one of an individual and the other of an organization. The missing person in this case is Harold Geneen, chairman of the board of ITT, and the missing organization (not that it could be indicted under the law) is the CIA. In the latter case, everyone must remember that the then head of the CIA, Richard Helms, who knew all about the dirty work in Chile, pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge for his lying to Congress on the same matter and got off with a small fine.

About Geneen, whose veracity in this affair must be extraordinarily suspect, the Justice Department is quite defensive. Announcing the charges against the two subordinates, Acting Deputy Atty. Gen. Benjamin Civiletti bridled at a reporter's question about why the generals in ITT were not being prosecuted along with the corporate privates. "The law," declared Civiletti, "doesn't depend on whether someone is senior or junior. It depends on the facts." Facts provable in court is what he must have meant, and we are asked to take it on faith that the government tried hard, and failed, to make a case against the maximum leader of ITT.

Perhaps Geneen had the protection, enjoyed also by Helms, of being able to expose the secrets of "national security" if he was forced into the dock. This blackmail power, in effect, is the best sort of protection

STAT

CONTINUED