

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

RE: Hoffa and the Teamsters Union

Background: In March 1964 James Hoffa, president of the Teamsters Union, was sent to Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary for thirteen years after being convicted of mail fraud and jury tampering. Hoffa had been a target of the late Atty. Gen'l. Robert Kennedy since 1957, when the latter was counsel to the Permanent Investigations Subcommittee of the Senate Government Operations Committee, and the former along with other Teamster officials were subjects of marathon hearings that lasted almost two years.

Following the 1960 election, Kennedy as Attorney General set up a special unit within the organized crime section of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice that was commonly known as "the Hoffa Squad" or "the Get Hoffa Squad". The unit was headed by non-lawyer Walter Sheridan (formerly of the Senate Committee staff) and reported directly to the Attorney General.

Shortly after taking office, no less than 15 grand juries were empaneled to investigate Teamster Union affairs. Hoffa, himself, was kept under 24-hour surveillance, although the leader of the Get Hoffa squad claimed "... never under any circumstances (have we) in anyway bugged or wiretapped ... Hoffa."

During the course of the effort to convict Hoffa, a diverse group of people felt that the government had exceeded its authority, e.g., Sidney Lews wrote in The Progressive: "Does the Justice Department have the right to go fishing into every area of a person's activities looking for possible crime? Or should the Department investigate only specific charges where it has reasonable assurance that a crime has been committed? The government has a right to subpoena a particular businessman if it has reasonable grounds to believe that he made a payoff to Hoffa to get a loan from the Teamsters Pension Fund. But it has no right to subpoena a hundred businessmen or even to send FBI agents to interrogate them, just on the chance that one of them made such a payoff. Yet the Justice Department in following the latter course, hitting in all directions that something will be uncovered which can be used to 'get Hoffa'".

Hoffa made numerous appeals to have his conviction overturned, none of which was successful. He had also applied to the parole board for parole, but had been turned down.

With the election of a Republican administration there was speculation that Hoffa might receive a commutation of sentence (Hoffa had endorsed RN in the 1960 election. His antipathy toward the Kennedys and the Democrats in general should have been no surprise. Moreover, the Teamster's Union had endorsed Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956).

Commutation of Sentence

The question of commutation came up at Ziegler's briefing on December 31, 1969 when he was asked whether he was aware of a meeting between Teamster officials and Clark Mollenhoff, then a White House official. Ziegler said he was unaware of the meeting. A similar question arose at Ziegler's January 5, 1970 briefing, but again he was not aware of any efforts being made to secure a commutation of sentence for Hoffa. On January 9, 1970 at another briefing Ziegler said Hoffa was not being considered for a commutation of sentence.

On January 22, 1971 Ziegler was told that there was a wire service report that intense pressures were being placed on the Administration "to release ... Hoffa ... in time for him to resume leadership of the Teamsters Union in July" (when they would hold their annual convention.) Ziegler denied there was any intense pressure being applied to the White House. However, he stated Hoffa's petition for Executive Clemency was being reviewed in the Justice Department and by the pardon attorney.

On December 21, 1971 the Detroit Free Press ran a combined wire story that originated in the Des Moines Register under the byline of Clark Mollenhoff, saying that the President is considering the release of Hoffa prior to Christmas. Mollenhoff, according to the wire stories, reported two motivations for a release: (1) release in December would time for any criticism that might erupt to die down before the President's visit to China and the Soviet Union; (2) Hoffa's release "in light of the recent disputes with ... George Meany" would assure Administration support within the Teamsters Union and among Hoffa's friends in the AFL-CIO.

On December 23, 1971, the Justice Department announced that the President had commuted Hoffa's sentence after he had served four years, nine months and 16 days of his thirteen-year sentence. The President attached a condition to the commutation which prohibited Hoffa from engaging in "direct or indirect management of any labor organization prior to March, 1980." The same day the President authorized 235 pardons and 15 other commutations.

Although there was some negative editorial reaction to the Hoffa commutation it did not excite the White House press corps. Perhaps, because the reaction was not widespread. There was general approval that the commutation was conditional. However, several saw it as a political deal while at the same time calling Hoffa a political prisoner in the first place.

On January 18, 1972, Ziegler was asked what were some of the considerations the President had in mind in releasing Hoffa from prison. Ziegler cited the restriction of union activity and the illness of Hoffa's wife as considerations.

On January 10, 1972 the Manchester Union-Leader in a copyrighted story claimed that Hoffa was given clemency because Attorney General Mitchell "in an effort to stymie possible indictment and prosecution of present and former members of the Justice Department for jury tampering." (Union-

Leader reports on the Teamsters Union, Hoffa, et. al. must be considered suspect because the publisher is heavily in debt to Hoffa and the Teamsters. The publisher, William Loeb, has carried on a crusade for Hoffa's release for years.)

On May 28, 1972 the Seattle Post-Intelligence in a copyrighted story claimed that: (1) "secret deals" between the administration and the Teamsters gave former Teamster President Dave Beck (Hoffa's predecessor) a moratorium of five years or longer if necessary to satisfy a \$1.3 million tax liability ; (2) RN commuted Hoffa's sentence in return for Teamster support of economic policy and reelection support.

In September 1972 Hoffa became involved with a confidence man named William L. Taub in a scheme to go to Hanoi to seek the release of American POW's. Secretary of State William Rogers, when he heard about the matter, revoked Hoffa's passport. This episode was merely embarrassing and while it provoked many questions from the White House press corps, when Taub was identified as a con man everyone, especially Hoffa, was happy to forget about the incident.

On January 17, 1973 the N.Y. Times published an AP story quoting Walter Sheridan, of the Get Hoffa squad, from a book he had written to the effect that Hoffa's release from prison "followed a chronology of bribery, threats and political intrigue that still reached into the White House." Sheridan also said Hoffa had been given "reason to hope he will soon receive a pardon from President Nixon."

Sheridan also accused Murray Chotiner, Donald Nagel (a Labor Department official) and Wiley Buchanan of being involved in a scheme to have Hoffa exonerated through the courts." Finally Sheridan accused Ehlichman of leaving word in September, 1969 "to go easy on the Hoffa matter." The article doesn't say who got this word.

No one asked the White House to comment on this story. Sheridan's book received a limited number of book reviews and also a limited syndication in newspapers. Beyond that his allegations received no attention.

On February 15, 1973, Jerry TerHorst reported that RN had told aides not to intervene in what was described as a feud between Hoffa and Frank Fitzsimmons for fear of losing Teamster support in the election.

There was no request for White House comment.

On June 5, 1973 the Detroit News reported that Hoffa had a 31-page statement from Edward Grady Partin admitting that he perjured himself when he testified against Hoffa in the jury tampering trial. Hoffa hoped to use this to get a pardon but because of Watergate this hope vanished.

There were no queries from the press on this story.

On September 15, 1973 Mollenhoff reported that the Senate Watergate Committee investigators were prepared to question Charles Colson about his

role in the release of Hoffa. According to Mollenhoff the Senate investigators have information that the release of Hoffa was "a political deal" connected with the 1972 election.

There were no questions raised on this column by White House reporters.

In an appearance on "Meet the Press" on October 14, 1973, Hoffa was asked by Philip Shabecoff of the New York Times, who said there were published reports that "a high Teamster official brought \$300,000 in cash to the White House during the 1972 presidential campaign. Now, last spring in an interview with a N.Y. Times reporter ... you said that you were aware of the contribution and other Teamster donations to the White House. Could you tell us what you know about those plans ...?

Hoffa: "In the first place I didn't say I was aware of it. I said I had heard there was a donation, but I had no direct information concerning the delivery of any money to the campaign. That was my exact statement and I have it taped. So far as donations to the political parties are concerned, I think it is the responsibility of responsible labor leaders to be involved in politics and the only way you can actually be involved in politics in through money and also votes of the membership."

Summary: Whatever the merits or demerits of Hoffa's commutation of sentence, it is ridiculous to assume that is was in return for his political support. It is on the record -- at least since 1957 -- that Hoffa has felt he was persecuted by the Democrats and the Kennedys in particular. Since he had spent time in prison, spent millions of dollars and was still seeking vindication through litigation in order to clear himself, it would be strange indeed if he were to offer support to Democratic candidates.

Furthermore, under Dave Beck's presidency, the Teamster endorsement traditionally went to the Republican nominee since the days of FDR. Beck, who also had been imprisoned, would hardly favor the Democrats. To suggest that the Teamster Union gives political support only in return for a "deal" raises the question about other labor unions and their political support. Is there always a quid pro quo -- or is it only the Teamsters are so venal?

Hoffa

5.3.73: Haldeman assisted Hoffa's release, after prodding by Chotiner to Timetex then delivered support to RN - T.U. raised \$750,000 for RN during '68 & '72, coming from casino money & from Allen Dorfman

Haldeman Arranged Hoffa's Release

By Jack Anderson

H. R. Haldeman, the ousted White House major domo, personally pulled the strings that opened the prison doors for ex-Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa.

The incarcerated Hoffa had been promised he would be free by Thanksgiving, 1970. This was considered so certain that his wife was permitted to telephone the happy news to him in the warden's office at Lewisburg, Pa., penitentiary.

But for a year, the Justice Department balked at recommending Hoffa's release, and the parole board turned him down twice. Not until ex-White House aide Murray Chotiner complained to Haldeman was action taken.

"It appears that nothing substantive has occurred," wrote Chotiner. "It is suggested that it should not take this long to perform if there is going to be any performance."

Chotiner's note to Haldeman was dated Nov. 3, 1971. By Christmas Eve, Hoffa was out of prison. His sentence was commuted by President Nixon after hundreds of thousands of dollars had been contributed to the Nixon campaign and after Hoffa pledged to "deliver" the Teamsters' Union into the Republican fold in 1972.

One source close to the Teamsters claimed the union had raised more than \$750,000 for Nixon, most of it in cash,

during the 1968 and 1972 campaigns. Much of the money came from Las Vegas gambling lords whose casinos were financed by the Teamsters' pension fund, swore our source.

Another source close to the President told us the amount was smaller. But all sources agreed that a huge cash collection was turned over to former Attorney General John Mitchell, in behalf of the Teamsters, by crime-connected Allen Dorfman. Mitchell flatly denied receiving any Teamsters contribution. "I was in the business of expending money, not receiving it," he told us.

Mafia Link

Dorfman has been linked by The New York Times to Mafia mobsters who allegedly have been trying to cut themselves into a Teamsters' medical program on the West Coast. The Times quoted from an FBI affidavit, which claimed Dorfman put Hoffa's successor, Teamsters president Frank Fitzsimmons, together with the Mafia mobsters in California last February.

After his meetings with the mobsters, Fitzsimmons flew back to Washington with President Nixon on the presidential plane. Dorfman, meanwhile, began serving a prison term for pension fund fraud and jury tampering.

We have spent several weeks piecing together the

story of Hoffa's release. Fitzsimmons made several approaches to Mitchell, beginning in mid-1969, to secure a parole for Hoffa. A promise of parole by Thanksgiving, 1970, however, fell through.

A confidential file shows that Hoffa's son, James, made a new approach in early 1971 to Murray Chotiner who was identified by the code name, "Mr. Pajamas." Contrary to published reports, Chotiner received no contributions or fees but assisted Hoffa for political reasons. On April 11, a Hoffa family friend, Charles O'Brien, spoke to Hoffa by telephone. A Teamsters associate, who also got on the phone, reported in a confidential memo:

"I told him that I passed on all information concerning himself to Mr. Pajamas who was putting same in the proper place so that the decision makers could make evaluations. . . (Hoffa) then told me that if he were out, not only could he deliver the Teamsters Union for the Republican Party in 1972 but that he could also deliver many construction trade unions as well. He told me that Mr. Fitzsimmons could not deliver anything without him."

Hoffa in Hair

The contact man in the Justice Department, thereafter, was Will Wilson, then chief of the Criminal Division. He told Chotiner on Aug. 10 that both

the President and Mitchell wanted "to get the Hoffa matter out of their hair."

Two days later, Wilson promised that "everything either has or will be done by Aug. 20 to assist in the release of Hoffa," but warned it was best "not to move too rapidly (to avoid) premature stories in the press."

Still nothing happened. On Oct. 7, young Hoffa appealed in a letter to Mitchell. The letter quoted Wilson as saying that Mitchell had personally approved an "understanding" that the Justice Department would make a recommendation for immediate release on parole. I specifically asked him whether my understanding was with him alone or whether it was with you and the administration. He assured me that it was with you."

Chotiner subsequently sent Haldeman a chronological account of the efforts to free Hoffa, along with a note suggesting "it should not take this long to perform if there is going to be any performance."

Footnote: The confidential file indicates that Hoffa suspected Mitchell and Fitzsimmons of deliberately holding up his release. Chotiner refused to comment, saying he "does not discuss matters involving the White House."