

Ex-Investigator Says Hoffa Had Aid of Ehrlichman and Chotiner

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17 (AP) — A former Justice Department investigator says that James R. Hoffa's release from prison followed a chronology of bribery, threats and political intrigue that still reaches into the White House.

Walter J. Sheridan, who headed investigations of Hoffa when the late Robert F. Kennedy was Attorney General, says that the Administration has given Hoffa "reason to hope he will soon receive a pardon from President Nixon." Then Mr. Sheridan says, Hoffa will be in a position to reassume control of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters from Frank E. Fitzsimmons, the current union president.

Among those who tried to help Hoffa over the years were John D. Ehrlichman, assistant to the President for domestic affairs, and Murray M. Chotiner, a former Nixon aide, Mr. Sheridan says in a book entitled "The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa."

Mr. Sheridan's contention that a group of Justice Department lawyers have secretly been laying the groundwork for a Presidential pardon was denied by a spokesman for the department or he said that the department remained "committed to seeing that Hoff fully observes the terms of his conditional commutation."

'Political Alliance' Seen

"It's a simple fact," Mr. Sheridan said in an interview, "that there's a terribly obvious political alliance between the Administration and the teamsters' Union." The former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation noted that Mr. Nixon drew teamsters' support in the Presidential election last year, as in 1968.

Hoffa was imprisoned in the federal penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pa., in March, 1967, on two separate convictions. He was released in December, 1971 on a grant of clemency from President Nixon, who stipulated that Hoffa refrain from union activity for 17 years.

One of Hoffa's convictions stemmed from the so-called Test Fleet case in Nashville, in which he allegedly received hundreds of thousands of dollars in payoffs through a trucking company set up in his wife's maiden name. That 1962 trial ended in a hung jury, last two years later Hoffa was convicted of tampering with the jury.

Also in 1964, he was convicted of defrauding the union's pension fund of nearly \$2-million. The case involved a Florida concern called Sun Valley, Inc.

As for Hoffa's grant of clemency, it took only a week for Mr. Nixon,

Mr. Sheridan writes that on to sign it after Hoffa's attorney had applied to the then Attorney General, John N. Mitchell. "The usual procedure, which takes weeks of contacting the sentencing judge, the United States Attorney and the Government prosecutors, had been dispensed with," Mr. Sheridan says. "The Criminal Division of the Department of Justice was not consulted."

Move for Pardon Seen

Mr. Sheridan asserted in the interview that Justice Department lawyers had hoped to build a case for Hoffa's pardon by attempting to portray the Test Fleet case "as so unjust a prosecution that Hoffa could be said to have been justified in tampering with the jury." Similarly, Mr. Sheridan says, "they are seeking to show that the Sun Valley case was defective, thus clouding the pension fund case."

On a separate front, Mr. Sheridan said, Mr. Chotiner, Donald Nagle, a Department of Labor official, and Wiley Buchanan, former Chief of Protocol, were involved in a scheme by a Boston teamster, Nick Morrissey, to have Hoffa exonerated through the courts.

Mr. Sheridan said that the plan called for "setting up a quickie grand jury" at which Edward Grady Partin, a teamsters' union agent who was a prime Government witness against Hoffa a decade ago, would be expected to say that he had not authorized the bugging of his car, a crucial point in Hoffa's appeals.

Denial by Chotiner

In exchange for this reversal, Mr. Partin would be granted immunity from an antitrust trial he faces in February, Mr. Sheridan said. So far, he added, Mr. Partin has refused.

When questioned by a newsman, Mr. Chotiner declared, "This is the first I've heard that I ever had anything to do with it. Whoever wrote that is a great writer of fiction."

Mr. Nagle acknowledged only that he was familiar with Mr. Morrissey and had introduced him to Mr. Buchanan at a political gathering for former Navy Secretary John H. Chafee of Rhode Island, Republican candidate for the Senate last year. Mr. Nagle said that, through Mr. Buchanan, he met last summer with Mr. Chotiner but that in "no way" did the subject of Hoffa enter the conversation.

Mr. Sheridan says that as early as September, 1969, Mr. Ehrlichman "left word to go easy on the Hoffa matter" because of possible clemency action. Mr. Ehrlichman could not be reached for comment.