

# Investigator Reports Political Intrigue Behind Hoffa Release

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former Justice Department investigator says James R. Hoffa's prison release followed a chronology of bribery, threats, an assassination plot and a long line of political intrigue that reaches — even now — into the White House.

Walter J. Sheridan, the man who headed the probes of Hoffa during the late Robert F. Kennedy's term as attorney general, says the administration has given Hoffa "reason to hope he will soon receive a pardon from President Nixon . . ." Then, says Sheridan, Hoffa will be in a position to reassume control of the union from Frank Fitzsimmons.

Among those who tried to help the fiery Hoffa over the years were Presidential aides John D. Ehrlichman and Murray Chotiner, Sheridan says in a book entitled "The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa."

Sheridan's claim that a group of Justice Department attorneys have secretly been laying the groundwork for a presidential pardon was denied by a spokesman for the department, who said it remains "committed to seeing that Hoffa fully observes the terms of his conditional commutation."

"It's a simple fact," said Sheridan in an interview, "that

there's a terribly obvious political alliance between the administration and the Teamsters Union." He noted that Nixon drew Teamsters support last year, as in 1968.

Asked if he still expects a pardon for Hoffa, Sheridan said "I think possibly is now a better word than probably. They've been playing it both ways. You have White House backing for Fitzsimmons, who obviously wants to continue as Teamsters president . . ."

"There's no question," said the former FBI agent, "but what Hoffa still has tremendous support, not only among the Teamsters, but among the building trades as well. The administration has to see which way the wind blows. Right now, they've got it blowing both ways for them."

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

One of Hoffa's convictions dated to the so-called Test Fleet case in Nashville, Tenn., in which he allegedly received hundreds of thousands of dollars in payoffs through a trucking company set up in his

wife's maiden name. Although that 1962 trial ended in a hung jury, Hoffa was convicted two years later of jury tampering. Also in 1964, he was convicted on charges of defrauding the union's pension fund of nearly \$2 million, a case which tied in to a Florida land deal called Sun Valley, Inc.

Sheridan asserted in the interview that Justice Department lawyers have 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, says Sheridan, "they are seeking to show that the Sun Valley case was defective, thus clouding the pension fund case."

On a separate front, says Sheridan, former White House Aide Chotiner, Department of Labor official Donald Nagle and former Chief of Protocol Wiley Buchanan were involved in a scheme by Boston Teamster Nick Morrissey aimed at having Hoffa exonerated through the courts.

Sheridan said the plan called for "setting up a quickie grand jury" at which one of the government's prime witnesses against Hoffa a decade ago, a Teamsters agent named Ed

Partin, would be expected to say he had not authorized the bugging of his car, a crucial point in Hoffa's appeals. In exchange for this reversal, Partin would be granted immunity from an antitrust trial he faces in February, Sheridan said. So far, he added, Partin has refused.

When questioned by a newsman, 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."

Nagle, meanwhile, acknowledged only that he was familiar with the Boston Teamster, Morrissey, and had introduced Morrissey to Buchanan at a political gathering for Rhode Island Senate candidate John Chaffee last year. Nagle said that, through Buchanan, he had met last summer with Chotiner, but that in "no way" did the subject of Hoffa enter the conversation.

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

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