

Tom Braden

Republicans 'open doors' for Hoffa in a bid for Teamsters' support

WASHINGTON — The child-like code in which Secretary of Labor James Hodgson disguised his message to the Teamsters at their Miami convention served to dramatize its meaning. "Doors are opening," the secretary told the membership assembled and the translation is clear. James Hoffa, the Teamsters' recently resigned president, will get at least parole and possibly full presidential commutation.

The decision had been telegraphed previously in other ways. Prison officials can recall precedent for permitting a federal prisoner to leave jail in order to

visit an ailing wife. They can recall none for permitting him to remain away eight days while holding business meetings with former associates in a hotel room. (Mrs. Hoffa, it turned out, was just fine.) And some months ago, President Nixon played host to publisher William Loeb of Manchester, N.H., whose various pleas and affidavits on behalf of Hoffa are habitually reported in the press straight-faced, as though the public could learn nothing from the additional fact that Loeb has borrowed millions from the Teamsters' pension fund.

It may be that the departure of Frank Sinatra from the Democratic camp was also a signal. Sinatra, one-time Kennedy and Humphrey fund-raiser is a close friend of Hoffa's, and has now become a friend of Vice President Agnew.

In any event, the union chief, who was convicted of jury tampering and of stealing will shortly be free to return to his political and financial affairs, which will surely include a voice in the management of the billion dollar Teamster pension fund. (The fund was only \$300 million in the days when Robert Kennedy was accused of being ruthless for insisting that jury tampering and stealing deserved punishment.)

In return for the favor of freedom, the Nixon political campaign next year may expect a certain cash flow, in addition to what votes Hoffa can swing from the two and one-half million Teamsters, their wives and other relatives.



James Hoffa
A favor of freedom