

Exit Hoffa NYTimes JUN 4 1971

James R. Hoffa has done the giant International Brotherhood of Teamsters a service by taking himself out of consideration for re-election to the union presidency next month. It would have been an affront to the nation if its biggest and strongest union had voted back into office a convict with nine years still to serve for jury-fixing and pension fraud.

Hoffa had good reason to believe that his popularity with the union rank and file, undimmed by his four years of absence in the Federal penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pa., would have swept him to another five-year hold on the Teamster presidency. Unquestionably the major element in his decision to step down was his awareness that chances for parole or executive clemency would be slim indeed if release from jail meant his automatic return to the driver's seat in a union with strategic control over the country's transportation lifeline.

The new Teamster president almost surely will be Frank E. Fitzsimmons, the caretaker whom Hoffa personally picked to keep things running when he went off to prison. The union's relations with the White House and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. have improved measurably under his interim leadership.

This trend can be expected to continue. So will the move, already well advanced, toward dismantling the centralized power Hoffa exercised during his decade in command of the Teamsters. What remains to be seen is whether there will be any real housecleaning inside the union or whether the hoodlums spotlighted in the McClellan Committee hearings of 1957 will merely sink into invisibility in the reconstituted regional branches.