

Hoffa Seeks Active Union Role

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DETROIT, Dec. 30—Almost five years in prison have not broken the spirit or ambition of James R. Hoffa.

In one of his first interviews since his release last Thursday from the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa., the former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters said today that he would fight in the courts so that he could again become active in union affairs.

Hoffa also said that he harbored no feelings of bitterness, not even against the Kennedys, whom he has accused in the past of carrying out a personal vendetta against him.

"I'm not bitter," he said. "I don't have time for that. They [the Kennedys] are gone. I'm here. It's done with. You've got to look ahead."

Sentence Commuted

Hoffa's 13-year sentence for jury tampering and pension fund fraud was commuted last week by President Nixon after the former labor leader had served 4 years, 9 months and 16 days. He was released under a conditional commutation of sentence that specifies that he cannot "engage in the direct or indirect management of any labor organization" until March 6, 1980, when his full term would have ended.

Hoffa said today that his immediate aim was to help his attorneys gather evidence for an appeal of his jury tampering conviction. He contends that one of the main witnesses in the jury tampering case, Edward Grady Partin, gave his testimony under duress. The appeal is now in the District Court in Chattanooga.

"I'm going to work to get rid of my conviction and win my case in Tennessee," he said. "I'm going to help gather evidence."

A 'Free Agent'

Hoffa added that, if he won the appeal, he would become a "free agent" and that the restrictions now imposed on him by his commutation would no longer hold. He said he had served almost all of his five-year term for pension fraud and thus would have paid his debt.

Meanwhile, Hoffa continued, he will carefully abide by the conditions of his parole. He said that he would socialize with a few of his union friends in Detroit and would occasionally visit the union hall of Local 299 here, where he built up the two-million-member teamsters union during the nineteen-thirties and forties.

"My hands were tied for five years when I was inside," he said with a grin. "They can be

Says Immediate Aim Is to Win Appeal in Tennessee Case

...tied a little longer now that I'm on the outside."

The former teamster leader said that he was grateful to President Nixon for commuting his sentence, but he added that he had not made up his mind about whom he would support in the Presidential campaign next year. Hoffa indicated that he would withhold his support until the middle of next year, when it became clear who was running for President and what the main issues were.

During most of the interview, which took place in an office in downtown Detroit, Hoffa discussed his experiences in the Federal penitentiary.

He said that his prison term had resulted in a deep commitment to change a system that turned young and frightened men into hardened criminals within 90 days.

Appeal to Congressmen

Hoffa said he planned to appeal to Congressmen who head committees that have been holding hearings on prison reform in an effort to get them to pass legislation that would make prison officials accept aid from outside citizens when it was offered.

He said he was particularly upset by the prison authorities' rejection of a plan he had proposed to aid poor prisoners while he was serving time in Lewisburg. Under the proposal, a fund of \$50,000 would have been created that would have been used to help pay the expenses of poor prisoners on funeral leave.

Hoffa said that many prisoners who want funeral leave must pay for the transportation, living expenses and salary of the guard who accompanied them. "Some of the guys have no money and can't take the leave," he said. "Can you imagine the state of mind of a prisoner whose mother, father, daughter or wife has died and he can't go to the funeral?"

Scores Prison Rules

Hoffa also said that some of the prison rules were so inflexible that they drove prisoners "wild." He recalled that a prisoner sometimes had to decide whether he wanted to visit a sick member of his family or go to the funeral.

"A man goes wild," he said. "I've seen prisoners in absolute tears when they try to decide."

He also recalled that a prisoner had learned through his hometown newspaper that his baby had been burned in a fire. Hoffa said that when that pris-

oner tried to get permission to call home, the prison authorities suggested that he write home first to find out how serious it was.

"It practically takes an act of Congress to get a phone call through," he added.

In his own case, Hoffa said, he had little trouble calling his wife, Josephine, when she was stricken with a heart ailment.

Hoffa will join his wife in Miami Beach next week and spend the next three months there.

Even though he was kept under maximum security for three years and had a job stuffing mattresses, Hoffa said that he had made up his mind "not to let it affect me."

"I told myself that it's only a matter of time," he continued. "Keep yourself active, read, write, get all the newspapers you can. My wife sent me 10 books a month."

He added that the support of teamster members who organized petition drives and sent him thousands of cards and letters helped to keep his spirits up.

While older men can cope with the pressures of prison life, Hoffa continued, many younger prisoners — particularly first offenders — go from confusion to fear and end up as hardened criminals.

He said he saw such transitions over and over again when young prisoners were serving the initial part of their sentences.

Reforms Urged

Hoffa urged that prisoners be separated according to their age and nature of their offense, and that the staff of counselors who work to rehabilitate the prisoners be expanded.

Although he said he was concerned about prison reform and planned to work for it, Hoffa added that he did not intend to make a career out of it.

Asked whether he thought the teamsters union had any major problems that he would like to see solved, he replied:

"Listen, the teamsters union is such a union that, if everybody on the executive board died in a plane crash, the joint council and lower echelon would keep it going like nothing happened."

"It's not a one-man union," he asserted. "It's never been a one-man union. It's everybody's union."