In a moment of triumph last December, Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa ventured a printable and, for him, almost tender assessment of his favorite and most tenacious enemy, Bobby Kennedy.

Jimmy mildly referred to the Attorney General as "that spoiled brat . . . that crumb-bum," and added, "Someday I'm gonna break both his arms."

Hoffa, whose raw teamster idiom is usually peppered with promises to break both arms and both legs of whatever bum comes to mind, was feeling charitable. It had been a satisfying day. In Nashville, Tennessee, a few hours earlier, he had beaten off the Government's fourth major attempt in five years to put him in jail. This time, a Federal jury had been unable to decide whether or not he was guilty of sharing a million-dollar payoff from a trucking firm as the price of labor peace. The case had ended in a mistrial.

It was a stunning setback in the Attorney General's crusade to divest Hoffa of the presidency of the 1.7-million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers (and casket workers, quarry workers, barbers, musicians, stagehands, hotel employees and car washers).

Flying back to Detroit in a chartered twin-engine plane, Hoffa relaxed from the strain of nine weeks in court by playing a few hands of gin rummy. Later he snoozed. Sharing the plane were part of the Teamster corps of lawyers and aides. Everyone felt jovial: Mistrial was as good as acquittal in the Nashville case. But Hoffa, before dozing off, made a point of warning his minions against complacency.

"Bobby, small and dangerous as he is, is liable to try anything," he said. "What does it cost him? Not a nickel. The taxpayer picks up the tab."

For years Hoffa has sought to foster the myth that he is the innocent victim of a rich kid's vendetta. The fact is, however, that he has rather impressive resources at his own disposal. Jimmy himself has estimated the Teamsters' assets at about $1 billion, and there seems to be no limit to the funds he can tap for legal expenses.

As Teamster boss, furthermore, Hoffa has a stranglehold on the American economy anytime he wants to squeeze. Teamsters drive the trucks that distribute the vital necessities of life—food, clothing, fuel, and merchandise—more than 80 percent of all freight moved in this country. A word from Hoffa can shut off supplies from stores and factories. Not even the dead escape him: A teamster drives the hearse. And next year Hoffa hopes to be in a position to dictate the terms of a master contract for all inter-state trucking, thus putting himself in a position to paralyze the nation's economic life by a coast-to-coast strike.

The thought that any one man, however personally trustworthy, should wield such unprecedented power has alarmed thoughtful Americans in and out of government. And that the man should be Jimmy Hoffa, notoriously arrogant and greedy for power, often accused of misuse of funds, and infamous for his toleration of hoodlum associates, makes the prospect still more perilous for the country.

In 1957 the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations voted to expel the Teamsters after its own investigation showed that the union "has been and continues to be dominated or substantially influenced by corrupt influences." More recently a leading
labor attorney said, "Hoffa no longer makes any pretense of purging the Teamsters of hoods and gangsters."

Still powerful in the union are such unsavory characters as Anthony Provenzano, better known as "Tony Pro," an international vice president and the president of Local 560 in Hoboken. At the moment Tony Pro is awaiting trial on two Federal indictments charging extortion and accepting illegal payments.

In Hoffa's own Local 299 in Detroit, George Roxborough, business agent, has pleaded guilty to and Roland McMasters has been convicted of accepting payoffs. McMasters is awaiting the outcome of an appeal. William Presser, president of the Ohio Conference, recently started serving an eight-month sentence in Federal prison for perjury. John J. Felice, president of Joint Council 41, Cleveland, has been convicted of accepting payoffs but is on appeal. Frank Matula of Los Angeles remains one of the trustees appointed by Hoffa to guard the union's funds although he has served a term for perjury.

Bobby Kennedy's crusade to eliminate Hoffa remains one of the trustees appointed by Hoffa to guard the union's funds although he has served a term for perjury.

Three times before Nashville the Government had tried to bring Hoffa to book. In 1957 he was acquitted on a charge of attempting to bribe an investigator for the Senate Rackets Committee. Later the same year he was brought to trial on a wiretapping count but went free when the jury failed to agree. Tried again on this charge in 1958, he won an acquittal.

Of these three defeats, the most humiliating for the Attorney General came the first. John Cye Cheasty, a New York lawyer, told Bobby Kennedy that Hoffa had given him money and told him to get a job on the Rackets Committee so he could secretly feed information back to the Teamster leader. Kennedy arranged a trap. FBI men were on hand with cameras when Cheasty delivered papers to Hoffa on a Washington street corner and was paid off. The case seemed airtight, so solid that Kennedy said he would jump off the Capitol dome if Hoffa were acquitted.

Teamsters have been howling "Jump!" at Kennedy ever since. Hoffa, on the witness stand, coolly admitted paying Cheasty $3,000 in cash out of a "revolving fund" in his office but said he wanted Cheasty as a lawyer, not a spy. The jury apparently believed his story. Kennedy, furious, blames the Justice Department for sloppy handling of the case.

The Attorney General still holds that conviction. So, presumably, does his brother the President, who said during the 1960 campaign, "I am not satisfied to see such men as Jimmy Hoffa... still free."

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of Test Fleet dividends to Hoffa. The prosecution showed that he had used some of this money to buy mining stock and some for a hunting-and-fishing lodge in upper Michigan which he then mag-
animously leased to Teamster officials. Apparently still more discomforting to Hoffa was the testimony of an old friend, George S. Fitzgerald, a leading Teamster attorney. Called as a Government wit-
ness, Fitzgerald testified that Hoffa had once asked him to take a $15,000 dividend check from Test Fleet and give him an-
other check in the same amount. Fitz-
gerald said that the Test Fleet check was made payable to Mrs. Hoffa and had been endorsed by her. He said he had agreed to
the swap, and the check he gave Hoffa
was introduced in evidence to show that Hoffa had cashed it.

Shortly after this revelation, Fitzgerald encountered Hoffa in the corridor outside the courtroom. Hoffa was seething with
anger. According to Fitzgerald, the Team-
ster boss told him, "You are finished. You
are fired. I want you to turn over all your books and records to the union." (Hoffa
denied firing Fitzgerald and insisted the
lawyer had resigned.) Fitzgerald, called Hoffa's statement a "fabrication."

By the time Hoffa took the stand he had cooled off. He denied that he was involved in or personally profited from the truck-
leasing deal. He contended that he had sought legal advice as to whether his wife's part-ownership of Test Fleet was a
violation of the Taft-Hartley Act; lawyers
had told him it was not. And he contra-
dicted Fitzgerald's testimony on the check
swap. He said Fitzgerald had come to him seeking a $15,000 loan. Knowing that by a
happy coincidence his wife had just re-
cieved a dividend check for that very amount, Hoffa said, he had suggested that
she give it to Fitzgerald and take the law-
yer's personal check for the same amount, holding it until he could make it good.

Hoffa blandly admitted that he had used his wife's Test Fleet dividends to finance certain business investments of his
own. But, he said vigorously, he con-
sidered the money a loan, and he always
"put it back in our joint funds at home." There was nothing unusual about this
arrangement, he told the jury. After all, he added, "I happen to be the husband of Mrs. Hoffa."

Futuous as Hoffa's protestations sounded, the Government was unable to prove them false. Perhaps even more
damaging to the prosecution's case was the
dull, stale, cumulative nature of its
testimony.

The only moment of real drama came
early in December when an unemployed
dishwasher strode through the swinging
gate, marched up to the defense table and,
drawing a BB pistol from his trench coat, fired point-blank at Hoffa.

"The gun made a much flatter noise
than a pistol," says chief prosecutor
Neal. "It just went 'Splat, splat, splat.'
I thought, 'What in the world is holding
Hoffa up?'"

But Hoffa was in no genuine trouble. The
innocuous pellets struck him on the
left arm, raising small welts. His assail-
ant, a 23-year-old former mental patient
named Warren Swanson, fared far worse.

"The minute a bonding company
descends on the company and subpoenas
its records. This is the kind of police-state
officials from obtaining bond against the
loss or theft of union funds.

"The minute a bonding company
bonds our union," he declared, "the FBI
depends on the company and subpoenas
its records. This is the kind of police-state
Gestapo system we are living in today."

The Justice Department denied the
charge, and Hoffa, asked by the House
Labor Committee for evidence to support
his charges, admitted that he had no
direct personal knowledge of Govern-
ment pressure on bonding companies.

But a regard for such niceties as evi-
dence is unlikely to keep Hoffa from
raising the cry of persecution at every
opportunity this spring. For he knows the
Government is engaged in preparing
the next and perhaps last major effort of the Kennedy crusade.

Last year, even before deciding to
bring him to trial in Nashville, the Justice
Department had begun moving against
Hoffa on a massive front. Throughout
the country at least a score of grand
juries began investigating various activi-
ties of the Teamsters, One grand jury, in
Orlando, Florida, returned a criminal
indictment against Hoffa, charging that
he has misused $500,000 in union funds and
committed fraud "by mail, telegraph and
telephone" in promoting Sun Valley
Inc., a Florida real-estate development
touted as the "Teamster Model City of
Tomorrow." Many building lots in this
model city, the jury charged, were "so
low and permeated with water as to
make them not suitable for construction
of homes." The indictment further
charged that Hoffa had a hidden option
to buy 45 percent of Sun Valley's stock.

Conviction in this case would make
Hoffa liable to 20 years in prison and a
fine of $85,000, and the Government
debated for months whether to try him
in Orlando or Nashville. It was finally
decided that the Test Fleet case offered a
better chance for quick conviction.

Now Kennedy's lawyers can either
revive the Orlando case or drop it in
favor of a far more comprehensive
charge of mishandling millions of dollars of the Teamsters' pension and
welfare funds. This case centers in Chicago,
where an indictment is expected to be
sought charging Hoffa and other Team-
ster trustees with using part of the huge
pension fund of the union's Central
States Conference to finance a series of
questionable real-estate ventures.

Reportedly about 60 percent of the
$180 million fund administered by these
trustees is invested in real-estate loans
and mortgages, and the underlying sus-
picion is that some Teamster officials re-
ceived kickbacks. Questioned about these
investments, Hoffa puts on his practiced
air of injured innocence. "Nobody got
defrauded out of a nickel," he says,
"so where in the hell is the problem?"
The Chicago case certainly promises no quick decision; it is immensely complicated. Hoffa, furthermore, has not reached his present eminence in a hoodlum-infested union without learning a great deal about the uses of power; and he has a corps of extremely shrewd legal minds ready to jump at a snap of his fingers. Nevertheless, Justice Department agents have been quietly sifting evidence for more than 18 months. Grand juries have investigated Teamster pension and welfare funds not only in Chicago but in 13 other major cities.

This time the Government knows its case, however complex, must be solid. Each past failure to make its charges stick has only lent apparent substance to Hoffa's carefully wrought self-portrait as the blameless victim of a personal vendetta. "There aren't many bites left in the apple," one Government official explains, "so the next one better be good."

It particularly had better be good because of Hoffa's goal of negotiating a coast-to-coast trucking contract in 1964. The prospect of any one man's holding such extraordinary power over the country is a chilling one, and no one who has seen Hoffa in action thinks that he would hesitate to use that power to enforce his will on the nation.

Hoffa himself scoffs at fears that he might call a nationwide strike. He maintains that it wouldn't be necessary, that the mere threat to strike one or two major lines would be enough to break employers' resistance to his demands. He may well be right. Even now most of the trucking industry is at his mercy.

Against Hoffa's sinister power no bargaining is possible. Contract terms are dictated. The employer can either accept them or be struck. "How do you bargain if you can't say no?" asks Joseph M. Adelizzi, managing director of the Empire State Highway Transportation Association. "How do you bargain if the other fellow holds a strike gun pointed at your belly? Saying no to Hoffa would be like committing suicide."

THE END