Hoffa Pledges Union Expansion

By SHIRLEY JONES

As Mr. James Hoffa opened his press conference, your reporter was gratified that her impulsive plan to get into the meeting had worked. Trying to be nonchalant among the two dozen men officially interviewing Mr. Hoffa for newspapers, radio and television, she drew from her purse a pad of paper and a pencil.

"Mr. Hoffa, you recently gave a 'State of the Union' message about the Teamsters to your union's executive council; would you tell us what that report said?" Hoffa beamed and informed us that the International Brotherhood of Teamsters is stronger than it has ever been.

MEMBERSHIP IS now 1,700,000, and is steadily growing. Financially, Hoffa continued, the Teamsters are "in good shape," but three plans for expansion will require funds above those now available.

The first of these plans is to increase the power of the Teamsters' Union by expanding its membership to include groups presently unorganized, such as migrant workers. The second plan is to increase again the pensions of retired Teamsters officials. The third plan is to enter politics to inform the voters about the candidates and policies that are dangerous to labor. When Hoffa was asked just how much of the Teamsters' $1,700,000 monthly income would be spent on politics, he replied mildly, "Whatever is needed."

Mr. Hoffa was in Houston last Sunday for a banquet to charter a local women's auxiliary to the Teamsters DRIVE; i.e., Democratic Republican Independent Voter Education. The women are to assist in the campaigns of candidates that the Teamsters decide to support.

IF NONE OF the candidates running for elections is satisfactory to the Teamsters, Hoffa told the reporters, then the union might present its own candidate. He quickly added that the Teamsters have no intention of forming an actual third party, and in response to a query about the possibility of his running for the presidency, Hoffa modestly said that he was just a union leader without the "special qualities" needed by a U. S. president.