

The Codefendants

Mandel's Colleagues Share His Elation

Sketches by George Rebb

Stories by Jackson Diehl

Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel was convicted of political corruption on Aug. 23, 1977, with five men, four of his closest friends and a lawyer who worked for the group. These five—Irvin Kovens, Harry Rodgers, William A. Rodgers, W. Dale Hess and Ernest N. Cory—were charged with corrupting Mandel by giving him thousands of dollars of gifts and business in-

terests in exchange for his support for legislation that benefitted the owners of the Marlboro race track in Prince George's County. Federal prosecutors charged that Kovens, Harry Rodgers, William Rodgers and Hess secretly bought and owned the Marlboro track, and made millions of dollars as a result of legislation that deter-

mined the number of racing days held there and regulated the track. According to court testimony, Mandel received about \$350,000 in clothes, vacations, help with his alimony payments, and interests in business ventures from the group. Cory, prosecutors charged, helped to conceal the ownership of the track.



Irvin Kovens

Irvin Kovens was a political boss and a millionaire long before he was accused of corrupting Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel, and his conviction—and the conviction's reversal day—have done little to change his position.

"What kind of help do I need?" Kovens asked scornfully Thursday. "Anybody who understands who I am would not ask me if this was going to help me."

Kovens was described by prosecutors as the major stockholder in the Marlboro Race Track, but steadfastly denied through both trials that he had ever had an interest in the property.

He said he was not surprised by the reversal of the convictions. "This is what I expected from the beginning," he said. "I expected this decision at the original trial until I saw what we had as a jury."

Mandel said that Kovens—who bought him \$2,333 worth of suits and provided \$155,000 worth of tax-free bonds for Mandel's alimony settlement with his first wife—shared "a close personal friendship" with him, and others said that Kovens looked on Mandel almost paternally.

Thursday, it was Mandel that Kovens was most pleased about. "I am very, very happy for him," Kovens said. "He's been put through a lot, very unfairly."



William A. Rodgers

Several of his codefendants were cool or openly bitter Thursday night, but for William A. Rodgers, the reversal of his conviction on charges of political corruption brought only joy.

"Justice for all!" was the answer at Rodgers' house, where one case of champagne was finished and another opened. "This," said Rodgers amidst the laughter and cheers of family and old friends, "is the happiest day of my life."

The reversal, Rodgers said, "lifted a ton of weights off my shoulders," but in other ways was almost unnecessary. Since his second trial ended 15 months ago, Rodgers has had little trouble continuing the work he has always known best: selling insurance and making money.

Described allegorically by federal prosecutors as the "wheelman" who "drove the getaway car" but didn't rob the bank in the alleged corruption scheme of Gov. Marvin Mandel and his business associates, William Rodgers has continued to work as vice president of Tidewater Insurance Associates, and says "last year was our best ever."

Consequently, Rodgers said, he was "happier for (Mandel) than for myself" when the court's reversal was announced.



W. Dale Hess

Hours after conviction on corruption charges was announced in August, 1977, W. Dale Hess sat in a bar at the Baltimore Hilton and soberly speculated that both his wife and son would have to go to work to make ends while he was in prison.

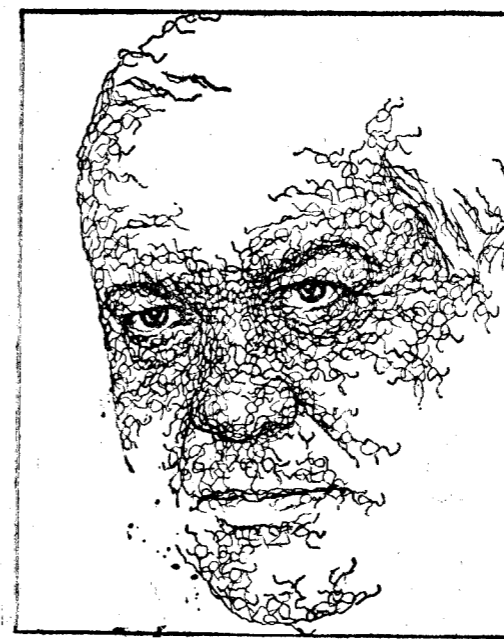
Yesterday, sitting in his vice president's office at Tidewater Insurance Associates, the reversal of that conviction brought much more cheerful thoughts to Hess's mind.

"I think I'll probably have a little more time to play golf now," Hess said. "I've been working every day from 6 in the morning until 10 or 11 at night, and I could use it."

Like Williams and Harry Rodgers, Hess says that his business and interests—he owns a motel and a restaurant near his Harford County home—have suffered no ill effects from his two trials and conviction.

But Hess's problems with the federal government have continued. The Internal Revenue Service has charged that he owes the government more than \$474,000 in back taxes for the years 1972 to 1975.

But Hess said yesterday, "I'm not worried about the taxes. It's not a serious problem. I've never let these things dictate my life—I just continue on from day to day."



Ernest N. Cory Jr.

Ernest N. Cory Jr., the only defendant in the Marvin Mandel corruption conspiracy case to apologize for his actions, had a prepared statement to read to all who called his home Thursday night.

It said: "I'm glad the Fourth Circuit (Court of Appeals) took a good hard look at the case. I wish it had been given a good hard look in the original instance."

"That's my comment," Cory added brusquely. There were no celebrations, no rejoicings at his home, he said. Of the six defendants in the Mandel case, Cory was the odd man out, the lawyer who worked for the group of friends, and since the trial, he has had the most over which to be bitter.

He has become poor, and since his August 1977 conviction on charges of concealing the true ownership of Marlboro Race Track, Cory has been unwillingly retired from practicing law.

"I've missed working," he said. "The federal government put me on a shelf by bringing this case."

His grandchildren came to visit the night his conviction was reversed, but Cory said, "it's the same old same old. Why should I be celebrating? I wasn't invited anywhere."



Harry W. Rodgers

All his life, Harry W. Rodgers says he has worked "every day, as hard as I can." In 20 years he rose from a minor insurance salesman to a millionaire many times over.

Hours after he learned that his conviction on corruption charges had been overturned, he said "none of this has changed my work at all. It just makes me want to work harder now."

Rodgers, now 51, last May broke away from the Tidewater Insurance Associates that he helped form in the 1950s to form his own new firm, Boone and Rodgers. But he says, "the split had nothing to do with the trial. It was office personalities. I still get along well with my brother, 'who is William A. Rodgers, his my brother,' who is William A. Rodgers, his in the corruption case along with Marvin Mandel and three others."

Rodgers was accused by prosecutors of making several major gifts to Mandel—including an interest in Eastern Shore land—that were part of the corruption scheme, and the reversal of his conviction, he said, "changes my whole outlook."

"If you've been convicted of a crime and you have to live with it, it makes it hard to go on," Rodgers said. "I feel like I'm a full-fledged citizen again."