

# The Mandel Furniture Caper

When Marvin Mandel and his wife, Jeanne, finally moved out of the governor's mansion during his political corruption trial two years ago, they are alleged to have taken a few mementoes with them—\$35,000 worth of furniture and \$3,800 in food and liquor. This action, if shown to be true, would further degrade Mr. Mandel's already sullied reputation as a Maryland chief executive.

Very little in the historic mansion that wasn't nailed down seems to have been overlooked when the moving van was loaded. Eighty-seven pieces of furniture, which the attorney general's office says are state's property, were carted off by the Mandels. The Mandels also are alleged to have cleaned out even the pantry and the wine cellars. Such behavior, if confirmed, would be utterly contemptible. Even while he was loudly proclaiming his innocence of the federal mail fraud and racketeering charges, Mr. Mandel was proclaiming he had never taken an illegal penny from the public coffers. Then, when an inventory disclosed that several pieces of furniture were missing, Mr. Mandel tried to end the matter by sending the state a \$3,187 check to pay for five of the items.

It turns out, according to report prepared by the attorney general's office, that this was the tip of the iceberg. Valuable vases, mirrors, china and chairs are

listed in official inventories as having disappeared from the governor's quarters. If it is proven that these items were taken illegally, it would buttress the finding of a federal district court jury that Mr. Mandel had trouble delineating the responsibilities of an elected public official and his obligations to the citizens of Maryland.

For the dwindling number of Mandel defenders, the mansion furniture charges must come as a shock. Throughout the ordeal of the Mandel trials, these individuals were steadfast in their support of the governor. They maintained he was being unfairly prosecuted—and persecuted—that he had done nothing wrong. But what do they make of this? At first it looked like a petty dispute over some chairs and a desk. Now it appears to be far more serious, casting another giant shadow over Mr. Mandel's reputation.

Still, the ex-governor says that he has done nothing wrong, that nothing was removed improperly from the mansion. Unless Mr. Mandel changes his tune by December 20, Governor Hughes has vowed to go to court to recover the state's property. This would be yet another indignity, in Mr. Mandel's view. "This is an outrage, a total outrage," he fumes. We couldn't agree with him more, but he may be mistaken as to who is the source of the "total outrage."