

# Mandel, a bit wiser, tells of prison 'education,' cites need for changes

By Allegra Bennett

A mellow Marvin Mandel sat in the window seat of Republic Airlines Flight 373 from Eglin Air Force Base, puffing on his pipe and waxing philosophic about his past 18 months as a teacher, an observer and most of all, an inmate.

He pondered his past, and of his immediate future he said that all he wants is to enjoy the private life he has never had and get reacquainted with his family.

"I have no bitterness," he said of his experience as an inmate at Eglin's federal prison facility in the Florida panhandle, but there are some regrets: "It would have been better not to have had the experience

at all."

The Marvin Mandel who returned home yesterday, in the company of an army of curious news reporters and cameras, was "not a different Marvin Mandel," he observed of himself, but "maybe a little bit wiser."

In the six hours it took to get home, Mandel talked about his conviction, politics and prison life.

"I received an education that many people in my circle don't have an opportunity to receive—to see the other side of life. It's very difficult to understand it unless you see."

Now that he has seen the other side of life, Mandel said, "It's conceivable that I

would lend myself to make some changes that are desperately needed."

Changes, for example, in the parole system. What are we doing about that situation, he asked, noting that since he entered Eglin on May 19, 1980, the prison population increased from 300 inmates to nearly double that by the time he walked out of the prison gates at 9 a.m. yesterday.

One of the reasons for sending an offender to prison is for rehabilitation, he observed, saying that "nothing is being done to rehabilitate."

"The focus is punishment. Just being locked up. It's the worst form of punishment."

What was it like for a onetime gover-

nor and political power broker to be stripped of freedom?

"No one took away my freedom. My freedom was within me. They took away my liberty.

"It is not an experience I would wish on anybody."

There are many inmates at Eglin serving sentences on marijuana charges, he said. The majority of them are convinced they are satisfying a public demand by supplying the drug and equate it with prohibition.

"I don't agree with it, but I understand," he said.

"Institutions can create criminals. By keeping them too long they get bitter. The

next thing you know they want to know how to get even."

He said that has not happened to him but the problem is one that perhaps he would like to have a hand in changing.

What does the man who was convicted of using the influence of his office think about influence-peddling as a crime?

He explains that he thinks the actual charge against him was "violating the public trust by not letting them [the public] know friends of mine bought a racetrack. They have been my friends for 20 years."

Mandel and five codefendants were convicted in a scheme involving the purchase of the Marlboro racetrack with the

governor's help.

"I think in any society where you are dealing with human beings you are going to have some frailties. While you are going to hope and strive for perfection, its going to be very difficult to find it. It's very difficult to have a perfect world."

There was a time when doing favors was acceptable, he observed, but noting that behavior has resulted in indictments of people accustomed to those ways, Mr. Mandel said that "standards change and people change."

As for those who got caught in the change of the times, "They were politically born into a pattern that at one time was

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acceptable and then became unacceptable. They got caught in the middle of the change."

On arrival in Atlanta, where there was a two-hour layover before heading for Baltimore, the former governor was greeted by airport personnel as a VIP and escorted to the executive lounge.

Dressed in a striped polo shirt, blue corduroy slacks and a matching jacket, Mandel made a telephone call then joined a few reporters to talk a little more about prison life and a little more about politics.

"Returning to politics encompasses an awful lot. I can't see active political involvement for me," he said.

But not entirely ruling out a possible role behind the scenes, he said, "I have a great interest in the state. If there is any way I can contribute anything—"

It's clear he wants to return to the love of his professional life.

Grinning broadly, he made an observation about Maryland politics, particularly, the run for the governor's seat. And he talked about Mayor Schaefer.

"You are taking for granted that Don Schaefer is not going to run. He's playing a very clever game. He doesn't have to go out and campaign," he said, adding that he has no basis for this theory other than "I feel this way."

While seated in a coffee shop during the layover in Atlanta, he took a careful jab at the U.S. Parole Commission, after reading a Justice Department announcement of his commutation just handed to him.

His commutation "was based primarily on the fact that . . . he would have been required to serve nearly four months more" than the three codefendants in his political-corruption trial, the Justice Department release read.

The press release appeared to agree with his own contention that he was unfairly kept in jail longer than anyone else for no good reason.

"They really blasted 'em," he said with a laugh in his voice, referring to the Justice Department's opinion of the parole decision.

Finishing off a hamburger, Mandel talked about his weight loss, noting that he is 15 pounds lighter than what he was 18 months ago. He attributed it to the "hit or miss" amateur cooks at the prison.

Some of the "misses" he said were meat saturated in salt and salt put in the sugar bowl.

Prison life also domesticated somewhat the man who said he never cooked before. "I learned to boil an egg; make scrambled eggs. . . . I never conceived that you can boil water and burn the pot."

And Jeanne would be glad to know, he suggested, that he has also learned to operate a washing machine to launder the four pairs of pants and four shirts that were his government issue.

While he was learning these things, Mandel said he read voraciously—250 books of every kind within 18 months; taught a speech class for inmates every Friday night and served as president of the Toastmasters Club for nine months.

Letters from friends like Mayor Harry Kelley of Ocean City, newspaper clippings from an old high school baseball team and books from friends helped make the time pass easier.

He did not have his favorite cherry-blend tobacco to smoke, though. Prison officials, adhering to their regulations, returned a package of the special blend prepared by Fader's Tobacconist of Baltimore.

As for his last days in prison, he remained active, playing racquetball and taking long walks.

The day before he was released, Mandel said, the prison superintendent told him "your sentence is being commuted today at 5 p.m.

"Are you sure?" Mandel asked. The superintendent responded that he was positive.

"After all the disappointment, all you can feel is, my God, I hope this is true," Mandel said.

He was given \$30 "severance pay" and left. "It sure was quick."

"I think they were delighted to see me leave," because he had been getting so many phone calls.

A few of the inmates got together and put a handwritten sign on the telephone booth, "For Governor Mandel's use only."

"Every Friday night I was teaching my class in speech. Tonight I won't be there. I'm delighted."