

Ford's Aid Sought



Jack Anderson

THE presidential confidant who negotiated the pardon of Richard Nixon tried to arrange leniency for another controversial figure during the last days of the Ford Administration.

President Ford was asked to spare Maryland's embattled Governor Marvin Mandel another corruption trial. The first trial was cut short by a jury tampering scandal. Now he is scheduled to return to court in April.

Mandel's friends contend that the governor can no longer get a fair trial anywhere because of the massive, adverse publicity. So attorney Benton Becker, the intermediary in the Nixon pardon, decided to speak to President Ford in Mandel's behalf.

Becker has been a close friend of Gerald Ford for years. Therefore, he asked the former President to consider sparing Mandel another trial.

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WHAT Becker sought, although no one at the White House wanted to describe it as such, was an Agnew-style solution. Ex-Vice President Spiro Agnew pleaded no contest to tax evasion and agreed to give up his high office. In return, the Justice Department dropped a host of corruption charges.

Mandel succeeded Agnew as governor of Maryland and, according to the testimony against him, continued many of Agnew's practices. Becker suggested that Mandel be given the opportunity to plead guilty to a minor offense and then step down from office, as Agnew had done.

White House sources confirmed that Becker discussed the Mandel question with both President Ford and his counsel, Phil Buchen. But just a few weeks ago, Agnew's lawyers had sought a last-minute presidential pardon for their client. They had been referred to regular channels at the Justice Department.

Under the circumstances, neither Mr. Ford nor Buchen felt it would be proper to intervene in the Mandel case.

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REVOLVING DOOR: We have written in the past about the revolving door between business and government. Take the case of James E. Smith, who used to be a lobbyist for the American Bankers Association. The next thing we knew, he was appointed comptroller of the currency in charge of regulating banks.

He dropped out of government a few months ago after making decisions that affect the prosperity of banks. He is forbidden by law from going to work for a bank for two years. Instead, we have found him working for a bank holding company.

Smith is now executive vice president of the First Chicago Corporation, which owns the First National Bank of Chicago. In fact, we reached him by calling the number of the bank.

"I am in no way involved in the operations of the bank," Smith explained. Neither the holding company nor the comptroller's office sees any conflict. We do.