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**Mandel's 1977 conviction is overturned**

## Former governor, five associates claim vindication

By Karen Hosler

"It looks like old times," quipped former Gov. Marvin Mandel yesterday as he faced his first press conference in years to claim complete vindication of the political corruption charges that ended his 28-year political career.

More than anything, though, it was Mr. Mandel himself, with his old, familiar, confident air, who seemed most reminiscent of those halcyon days of the 1970s when he was the undisputed top man of Maryland politics.

"I said all along that I never did anything to hurt the people of the state of Maryland, and today the judge has said the same thing," Mr. Mandel proclaimed. "I feel fully vindicated now. . . . It's really a great feeling."

Grinning broadly, and dressed in a three-piece suit and hiking boots, Mr. Mandel, 67, who had lately seemed aged and shrunken, now appeared in unusually robust health. In fact, there was no visible evidence of the decade since he left the State House with the exception of the absence of his trademark pipe — a casualty of his decision several years ago to quit smoking.

He and his wife, Jeanne, who sat at his side, left no doubt about the strain of their 12-year ordeal, though. "It's been a nightmare," Mr. Mandel said.

"Just being accused of wrongdoing is the worst part," he said, referring to the indictment that came in 1975. That was worse, he said, than the 19 months he spent in federal prison in Florida, which he called "brutal."

Jeanne Mandel, who occasionally squeezed her husband on the arm during the 20-minute session at his lawyer's office, said the worst part for her was "being separated from my husband."

The former governor also lost his license to practice law, which he said he expects now to regain. Since his return from prison in 1981, Mr. Mandel has worked as a radio talk



THE SUN/AMY DAVIS

Marvin Mandel and wife, Jeanne, relax after press conference.

# Mandel, 5 others revel in vindication

## Only 1 didn't serve a prison sentence

### REACTION, from 1A

show host and as a consultant to a construction company.

He insisted that the couple feels no bitterness.

"I know that sounds strange to a lot of people," Mr. Mandel said. "But we have made our own life. We've made a family life. . . . Jeanne and I are entirely grateful to the people of the state of Maryland who over the years that we have been engaged in this fight have stood by us."

"I was a little bit late here today," he added, "because the telephone was ringing off the hook, with people calling up to say: 'Congratulations, we knew it all along.' Tell them I said, 'Thank you.'"

Mr. Mandel brushed aside suggestions that yesterday's action might still be overturned on appeal, or that he might never be able to repair the damage to his public image.

"We've had so many ties, this is the first time we've won," he said of the sometimes bizarre legal twists his case has taken over the years. "I'm going to savor that and enjoy that rather than worry about appeals."

Mr. Mandel insisted that his political career was "behind me" and that he had no intention of a future bid for public office. But as the press conference drew to a close, he recalled the sentence which would end his State House meetings with reporters and asked: "Is anybody going to say, 'Thank you, governor?'"

Although they held high expectations from yesterday's ruling, Mr. Mandel and most of his five co-defendants did not learn about it until hours later.

Co-defendant Irvin Kovens, the longtime West Baltimore furniture dealer and financial backer of Mr. Mandel, Gov. William Donald Schaefer and other politicians, was the first in the group to receive the news.

"My attorney called me late this morning. He said, 'You've been vindicated,' and he read me the closing statements of the judge. Of course I said I was very happy," Mr. Kovens said.

Mr. Kovens, who served six months of his 3-year sentence before being released in November 1980 because of failing health, said he spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon trying to find Mr. Mandel and the Rodgers brothers, Harry and William, to share the news with them.

Mr. Kovens said he got a message through to the Rodgers, who then called him from a business meeting they were attending on the West Coast. Mr. Mandel first learned of the decision when he returned an urgent phone message from his lawyer, Arnold M. Weiner.

Meanwhile, another lawyer spent hours trying to locate W. Dale Hess, finally reaching the former House majority leader at a doctor's office.

Co-defendant Ernest N. Cory Jr. first heard the news when a reporter called to get his reaction.

"It's been 12 years," he said. "I've gotten used to being a felon. Now I'm not a felon."

While conceding that he was "very glad to be vindicated after all

this time," Mr. Kovens said he had not really given any thought to the idea that the petition to clear their records would be successful.

"But I never thought we'd be convicted in the first place," he added.

Mr. Hess, who spent 18 months in federal prison, declared yesterday, "I'm not bitter about anything." But he added quickly, "I just wish the Supreme Court had heard our case and not taken more than a year out of my life."

A prospering real estate developer with extensive land holdings in Harford County, Mr. Hess regards his time in prison — at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala. — as forgettable. "I've washed it out of my mind: it's something I don't want to think about," he said.

"Now, I'm very happy," Mr. Hess said. "This was something very personal that I wanted to see happen."

Mr. Cory, a lawyer who was accused of being the front man for the secret purchase of Marlboro Race Track, was the only defendant not to serve time in prison, although he was suspended from the practice of law in December 1977, disbarred in 1980 but then reinstated in 1984.

Since 1985 Mr. Cory has worked on a part-time basis for state Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein, providing legal advice on regulations, liens and bankruptcies for the Income Tax Division, earning about \$14 an hour.

After the case's many twists and turns, his initial reaction to yesterday's news was: "Same old, same old."

Reporters John W. France and Richard H. P. Sia contributed to this article.