

# Ex-governor, wife cry over commutation news

By David Brown

Marvin Mandel and his wife Jeanne were joined in tears yesterday afternoon as they shared the news over the telephone that the former governor's 6½-year ordeal with the law soon will be over.

As Mrs. Mandel got the news from her husband about 4:45 p.m. in a phone call from a prison in Florida, she said, "He just busted out in tears. He cried and cried."

"He could only say, 'Baby, I love you. I love you,'" Mrs. Mandel recalled several hours later.

The former governor's tears moments later were joined by those of Arnold Weiner and Bruce C. Bereano, two attorneys who have tried for months to get Mandel's prison term shortened.

"We all got on the phone and there was not a dry eye in the bunch," Mr. Weiner said. "We are just so elated that it's hard to believe, frankly."

Support—if not elation—for President Reagan's decision to end Mandel's imprisonment five months early was virtually universal yesterday. Lawyers, prosecutors and associates involved in the long political corruption trial and the appeals agreed that little was served by keeping the 62-year-old Mandel in prison.

"I think the man has suffered enough and I think it's time for him to be released," said Ronald S. Liebman, one of the three men who prosecuted Mandel.

Blair Lee III, who served as Mandel's lieutenant governor and took over as acting governor during his second trial, said he hoped the former governor "will make an easy transition back to normal life and

find suitable work and put that whole scene behind him.

"Whatever wrong he may have done—and I have some question about that—the fact of the matter is he was a very great governor of Maryland for a great many years," Mr. Lee said.

"I'm satisfied with their decision," Governor Hughes said at a political fund raiser in Baltimore county.

Jervis S. Finney, the U.S. attorney who started the investigation and brought the indictments against Mandel, said that "the president's action seems appropriate to me," adding: "It's always been my view that people, when they serve their sentence, have paid their debt to society."

"I think it's just wonderful. I think it's long overdue," said William Rodgers, one of the five other defendants in the former governor's corruption trial.

Other persons noted, however, that while it is unlikely anyone would publicly argue for Mandel's continued imprisonment, in the words of one of those persons, "That is a position many intelligent people undoubtedly hold for good reasons of principle."

The keenest joy, of course, was felt by Mandel's family.

Mrs. Mandel called yesterday "the most wonderful day of my life" and said her son, Paul, "did a dance" when they heard the news. Just yesterday the high school teenager got into a scrap defending Mandel at school, she confided.

"I told him to go back and give [the other boy] another hit tomorrow," Mrs. Mandel said. See REACT, A5, Col. 1



Jeanne Mandel smiles after receiving word that her husband, Marvin Mandel, has received commutation of his prison sentence.

AP

# Family, friends jubilant at commutation

REACT, from A1

del said.

Her husband told her, after learning the news, that he "had always had a great deal of respect for Ronald Reagan . . . now I will never forget him," Mrs. Mandel said.

There was some confusion yesterday as to how the former governor actually received the news. One of the early bearers of the tidings was Abe Pollin, owner of the Capital Centre arena and one of the men who spearheaded a campaign for Mr. Mandel's release that began in August.

Mandel's lawyers yesterday paid copious praise to two dozen prominent persons, most of them politicians, who signed a letter supporting a shortened sentence, and who personally contacted several members of Congress who ultimately took

the issue to President Reagan.

"We have great gratitude for all the people who assisted him through this awful ordeal he has gone through," Mr. Weiner said.

"It's just good to know that people of that nature live on this earth," Mr. Bereano said.

Mr. Weiner said he has talked to Mandel at least three days a week since he entered prison 19 months ago and more frequently in recent months, when Mr. Bereano often joined in the telephone calls.

"We would talk to him about the day's events both in his life and in the outside world . . . Bruce and I are going to miss having our morning coffee with Marvin," Mr. Weiner said.

The attorneys noted that the commutation takes effect the day before Hanukkah begins, and that the dates are not coincidental.

"Mr. Mandel is a deeply religious man and it is important that he be home with his family for these holidays," said Mr. Bereano.

Mr. Weiner said that "we were trying for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur" as earlier dates for release.

The lawyers said that Senator Paul Laxalt (R, Nev.) and Representative Jack Kemp (R, N.Y.) were the chief advocates with the president for Mandel's release. They speculated that Mr. Laxalt's and Mr. Reagan's personal acquaintance with Mandel from the days when they were all governors might have helped bring the commutation quickly, after a Justice Department report on the matter was delivered to the White House.

Among the persons whose opinion was sought by the Justice Department was Barnett D. Skolnik, one of the assistant United States attorneys who prosecuted Mandel.

"I wrote a letter and gave them my views and among the things I said is that, yes, I thought the commutation should be granted," Mr. Skolnik, now in private practice in Washington, said.

"I don't think there is any public interest to be served from his continued separation from his family and community. . . . I think he and his family have done enough time."

The former prosecutor added, however, that "there is not a shadow of a doubt that he was properly convicted and imprisoned . . . but there comes a time when enough's enough. I think there are many people today who only approve of the commutation in that sense."

Russell T. Baker, Jr., the former United States attorney who served during Mandel's appeals, said he, too, believed the commutation "is the right thing," and

added that he believed all the codefendants in the case "have been in jail long enough." Mr. Baker said that he twice wrote to a parole board advocating Mandel's early release.

Frank DeFilippo, Mandel's one-time press secretary, said the prison term had martyred his former boss.

"There was no use in keeping him in prison," he said. "The federal government, with all its subtlety and delicacy, has virtually made a martyr of him by now, which is fine."

"I told him a long time ago if he'd have done a Chuck Colson, become a Jew for Jesus, he'd have been out sooner," Mr. DeFilippo said.

Reporters Tom Horton, Richard H.P. Sia and Doug Struck contributed to this article.