

Mandel refutes Anderson column

BALTIMORE (AP)—The attorney who arranged Richard Nixon's pardon also sought an "Agnew-style solution" to the political corruption charges facing Gov. Marvin Mandel, it was reported Wednesday.

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson said Benton Becker, the lawyer who acted as middleman on the pardon of the former President, asked President Ford, an old friend "to spare...Mandel another corruption trial."

Anderson said Mandel's friends "contend the governor can no longer get a fair trial anywhere because of the massive, adverse publicity." It did not say who approached Becker with the idea.

The column is scheduled for publication Friday. The Baltimore News American published portions of it Wednesday after showing it to Mandel.

The paper said Anderson filed a late insert saying that Mandel was "totally unaware" of the plan. Mandel himself said the report "can't be true...I know nothing about it."

In his State of the State address to the General Assembly Wednesday, Mandel alluded to the column and said he had no intention of plea bargaining or asking for a pardon.

"I will not bargain or beg," the governor said. "I will not petition or grovel. I will fight for my freedom and my honor with every physical and financial resource I have. I will accept no deal even if offered."

In Washington, Becker said he had discussed the publicity surrounding the Mandel case with Ford, but only as "an

informal, general discussion... (about) the effect of publicity and possibility of a fair trial as result of the publicity."

He said the discussion probably took place Dec. 8, the day after the first trial of Mandel and four codefendants ended in a mistrial. A new trial is scheduled to begin April 13.

Anderson said in his column that Becker had suggested to President Ford that Mandel be "given the opportunity to plead guilty to a minor offense" and resign his office.

The plan, he said, was similar to that surrounding the plea bargaining of Spiro T. Agnew, who pleaded no contest to a tax evasion charge and resigned the vice presidency on Oct. 10, 1973.

In return, the Justice Department dropped a grand jury investigation into possible corruption during Agnew's terms as Baltimore County executive, Maryland governor and vice president.

"What Becker sought, although no one at the White House wanted to describe it as such, was an Agnew-style solution" for Mandel, Anderson said.

"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," according to the column.

Anderson added, however, that Becker's request to Ford and Philip Buchen, the President's counsel, was rejected on grounds of consistency with a recent refusal to process a requested pardon for Agnew outside of Justice Department channels.

Becker vigorously denied that he had sought an "Agnew-style solution."

"There was no discussion of an Agnew-type plea...no discussion of interceding," said the lawyer, who added he does not know Mandel.

Mandel and the others are charged with an overall scheme involving mail fraud, bribery and prohibited activities under federal racketeering laws.

Specifically, the government alleges that Mandel received favors and business interests in return for his influence on legislation benefitting Marlboro Race Track, which was secretly purchased by his codefendants in December 1971.