

'MY BOY PETER'

BY MRS MANDELSON

In the Commons he's known as the Prince of Darkness, but there is one person for whom the sun never sets on Peter Mandelson. Paul Donnelley reports



ROLE MODEL: The late Herbert Morrison

Tony Blair once said: "My project will be complete when the Labour Party learns to love Peter Mandelson." While that clearly has yet to happen, there is at least one woman who does love Peter Mandelson totally, absolutely and unconditionally. She is the Honourable Mrs Mary Mandelson and she has a very strong political pedigree.

As the daughter of the Right Honourable Herbert Morrison, the late Deputy Leader of the Labour Party who, as Home Secretary, was first criticised and then praised for his role in the organisation of the 1951 Festival of Britain, she is long-schooled in the art of Labour politics. She also happens to be Peter Mandelson's mother.

The man they call Mandy came into the world on October 21, 1953, the son of Mary and George Mandelson, the late advertising director and financial editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, who was known to his colleagues as Tony Peter was born into a very politically aware household

where political debate was ever-present. "He just sort of grew up in a political atmosphere," says his mother. "Peter always saw eye-to-eye with his father but they were slightly different in their attitudes."

It would appear to have been a slightly austere upbringing in some ways, however, as Mrs Mandelson confesses that she does not have a family photograph album. "I've got a box of photographs and I've got absolutely no idea what they are and where they were taken," she says.

Perhaps this rather frivolity-free approach stems from her own childhood as the daughter of a busy politician who worked long hours. "I very rarely saw my own father," she says. "I'd see him perhaps at the breakfast table for about five minutes. He was working and would get home well after my bedtime and then he'd come down to breakfast. That would be the whole week. He might be at home on a Sunday, if I was lucky."

The Morrison genes soon came to the fore in his grandson. "Peter

was quite political at an early age," recalls his mother. "He took an interest and the [Harold] Wilsons lived round the corner watching what he was doing. He liked talking to politicians from quite an early age."

Nor was the young Mandelson backward in coming forward when it came to approaching his political heroes. "He was never that kind of [shy] person," says Mrs Mandelson. "He may have just waded up and seen whether he would get a good reception. I don't know what went on in his mind."

'I don't think many things went wrong with his masterplan'

Just as his home life was content, so was his school life. "Peter was very happy at school," says Mrs Mandelson. "He had a very enjoyable time from nursery school onwards. He was a popular child with lots of friends." Indeed, Mandelson has managed to remain friendly with some of his fellow pupils from Hendon County Grammar School, which he attended from 1965 to 1972.

It has often been said that many children "know" they are different from an early age because of a particular trait or "feeling". Mandelson certainly fits into this category. "I don't know how," laughs Mrs Mandelson, "but I always knew Peter would become successful. He was in control all the time. He knew what he wanted to do and he did it. He had his ups and downs. Things get in the way, but apart from that everything

went pretty well to plan, I think. He's always been active and doing something.

"He didn't join a club at school but would organise his friends, although it would be nothing as trivial as, say, organising a trip to the pictures at the weekend. He joined the Cubs first and then the Scouts. I wasn't very keen on the Scouts myself. That was his idea, not mine. He got a few badges, but

he's not that sort of person really, clocking up all the badges."

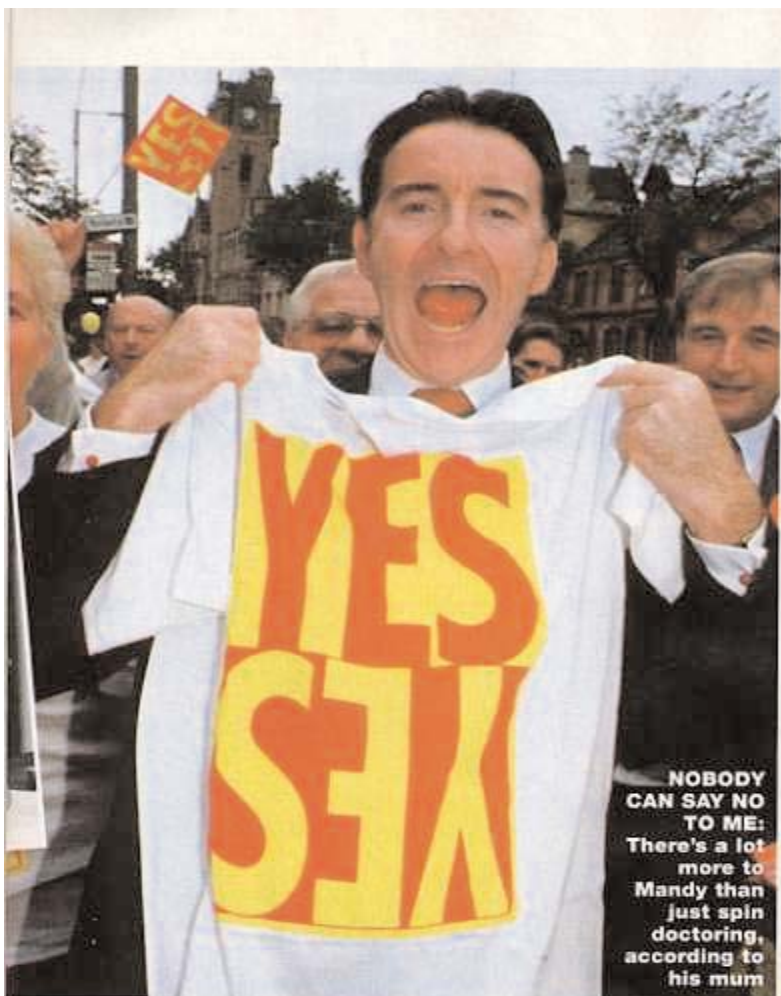
One of the many accusations levelled at Mandelson today is his apparent desire to be a "control freak". From what his mother has said about him it is obvious that this desire to control everything and everyone around him was visible at an early age. "He was a very determined child. Quite in control, never messed it up," she says. "I mean, you do have your ups and downs. Things don't always go to plan, but I don't think many things went wrong with his masterplan. If they did, he didn't tell me."

Mandelson may have inherited his political nous from Herbert Morrison — at least, that's the way his mother sees it. "Yes, they are sort of similar, I think... determined to see it through, but Peter's not ruthless. If he could



I'm celebrating my success with my friends. Drinks on me!

That'll be a pound then, sir.



**NOBODY
CAN SAY NO
TO ME:
There's a lot
more to
Mandy than
just spin
doctoring,
according to
his mum**

see Peter today I think he'd be rather pleased," laughs Mrs Mandelson, "and very proud. He organised the Festival of Britain amid great criticism and derogation and Peter comes in for that about the [Millennium] Dome. I don't know whether they made him do the Dome because his grandfather did it or not. Anyway, the Festival became an enormous success. We'll keep our fingers crossed and hope the Dome is [too]. I'm sure it will be."

He may be one of the five acknowledged architects of New Labour, but where does Peter Mandelson see himself in 10 years' time? In the Cabinet reshuffle at the end of July he finally got to the top table in his own right as Trade and Industry Secretary.

Before the Cabinet appointment much of his status stemmed from his closeness to Tony Blair. It is an elevation that is the source of some satisfaction.

"He is very happy where he is at the moment," his mother reveals. "Very happy because he wanted to get away from the spin doctoring lark. He was fed up with that. There is a limit and he wanted to have a ministry. The press seem to think he is just a spin doctor. There's a lot more to him than that. He's been around for a very long time, in fact.

"People seem to think he just

suddenly appeared as a spin doctor out of the blue. That's not true because he's done a lot of work in the Labour Party. He worked as Neil Kinnock's director of communications [from 1985 to 1990] and he was with LWT before that as a producer [1982-1985]. He learned a lot there. I don't know about honing his presentational skills, as has been alleged, but it was all good training."

As we have seen, Mandelson was close to Kinnock but, according to his mother, did not get on so well with his successor: "There seemed to be a cooling off when John Smith was leader because I think he [Peter] wasn't very popular with him. I think it was the spin doctoring. He didn't like that kind of thing. It wasn't his scene at all.

"Mr Kinnock broke the ground for those who followed, but I don't know how much contact Peter had with John Smith. Even before he became leader of the party I don't know how much contact he had with him." That all changed on May 12, 1994, when John Smith died unexpectedly of a heart attack. The rest, as they say, is history.

So now for the \$64 million question: does Peter Mandelson want to be prime minister? "I have no idea," says his mum. "He never mentioned it." □