

# Return of The Fighter

Israel has had a change of prime minister. Likud's Shamir has replaced the old fox, Peres. **Steve Vines** argues that, as a result, the prospects for a Middle East settlement are even dimmer

**T**he old terrorist is back. Comfortably installed in the rather austere prime minister's office in Jerusalem sits the 71 year old Yitzhak Shamir.

His predecessor, Labour leader Shimon Peres, has assiduously kept his part of the bargain and handed over the job to Shamir. Peres knows all about bargains. He served his political apprenticeship as bag carrier to David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister. Ben-Gurion brought to Israeli politics all the ruthlessness and complex manoeuvring which he learned in the tough school of the Eastern European tradition.

It was Ben-Gurion who vividly saw the threat posed by the right-wing Zionists in the period before the foundation of the Israeli state and it was Ben-Gurion who forced a showdown by threatening to blow up a ship carrying arms for the Irgun, the right-wing terrorist organisation run by Menachem Begin, Shamir's predecessor as leader of the Likud bloc. The Irgun backed down and handed over their arms to the Haganah, which was dominated by the labour Zionists. In so doing they conceded political supremacy to the labour Zionists.

**The shotgun marriage of the Likud, the Labour Party and practically every other political party in Israel after the election two years ago was, given the history of bitter differences, hardly a love affair. It was forced on the politicians by an Israeli public tired of political wrangling.**

Somehow, probably because the prospect of divorce was worse, the uncomfortable marriage has worked. Much in the same way that Italy's seemingly endless succession of governments since the war have managed to govern despite a dubious political mandate, Israel's coalition government has brought a kind of stability. The ques-

tion puzzling most Israelis and indeed others concerned about the Middle East is what difference the change from a Labour to a Likud prime minister will make.

Many Arab commentators see little if any difference between so-called right wing and left wing Israeli governments. As far as they are concerned Israeli parties of the Left and Right are both Zionist and therefore the same. They are wrong and would find out why by carefully studying Yitzhak Shamir's political career.

**Like most of Israel's political leaders** Shamir comes from Eastern Europe. In the heady days after the Russian revolution when Jews were drawn in disproportionately large numbers into revolutionary politics, a smaller number embraced Zionism. In those days revolutionary politics were the norm and the Zionists could only compete for adherents by presenting a radical face. Distrusting the predominant socialist-inclined Zionist movement the followers of Ze'ev Jabotinsky created the revisionist Zionist movement. Shamir joined the revisionists and emigrated to Palestine where he was quickly drawn into the struggle against the British mandatory authorities and the socialist Zionists who held sway over the Jewish Agency, Israel's government-in-waiting. Unlike Begin who became a leader of the mainstream Irgun, the fighting wing of the revisionist movement, Shamir joined the splinter Israel Freedom Fighters, better known as the Stern Gang.

Whereas the Irgun were prepared to declare a truce with the British, the Stern Gang believed that the anti-imperialist struggle should continue during the second world war. The Stern Gang came to worldwide prominence with the 1944 murder of Lord Moyne, the British minister resident in Cairo. Its political beliefs have been obscured

by subsequent history but they were – in today's terms – quite surprising.

**The Sternists were not anti-Arab,** indeed they saw the Arabs as potential allies in the fight against the British. They were also pro-Soviet and eventually declared themselves to be 'revolutionary socialists'. Their politics combined a strange mixture of passionate Jewish nationalism with a concept of 'national communism'.

Like the Irgun, this volatile organisation was disbanded after the foundation of the state of Israel; most of its members retiring from active politics. Some became active socialists; others veered into the extremist greater Israel movement. Shamir, who was twice captured by the British and had to escape further detention by fleeing to Eritrea, seemed to have dropped out of politics.

Like many of his former colleagues however, he gravitated towards Israel's secret service which he left in 1965 having risen to the position of head of Mossad's European section. His time with the secret service coincided with a period in which the service looked as though it was getting out of the government's control and was pursuing its own political objectives, notably a crude attempt to increase American unease about Abdul Nasser's Egypt by clandestinely staging the bombing of American premises in Cairo.

Shamir always seemed most at home in clandestine activity and the kind of politics which by-passed the democratic process. However in 1973 he entered parliament as a member of Begin's Herut Party. Strangely for a man who spent most of his life avoiding compromise, he rose to the top of the party as the compromise candidate. He lacks the demagoguery of Begin and the common touch of politicians like his greatest rival, David Levy, but he has the confidence of the old timers who run the party and know him as a sound member of the core 'fighting family'.

**When Begin became prime minister and** Egypt's President Sadat visited Jerusalem some extremely fatuous comparisons were made between de Gaulle and Begin. Commentators recalled how it took the hardline French president to do a deal with the nationalists in Algeria and pacify the French settlers. They thought that, like de Gaulle, Begin was the man to sell a deal to the intransigent Israeli public who evidently showed little appetite for compromises with Arab governments.

**B**egin of course had no such inclination. He was not following the intransigent attitudes of the Israeli public, he was helping to form them. Shamir is in the same mould but more so. He lacks Begin's urbane charm and intellectual depth and so appears more blunt and more hardline. His relatively short acquaintance with party politics has left him desperately short of presentational

skills. Lacking the ability even to appear flexible (something Begin miraculously managed to achieve) Shamir falls back on the traditional recourse of those lacking confidence, and is stubborn.

The contrast with Shimon Peres could not be greater. Peres is a man interested in power not in ideas. He has carefully worked the system until he clawed his way up to the top. His one act of political non-conformity, briefly leaving the Labour Party in the shadow of Ben-Gurion, was more to do with his personal loyalty to his master and belief in his return to power, than any ideological split.

**So called 'moderate' Arab politicians** like King Hussein and President Mubarak of Egypt recognised that they could do business with Peres. The superpowers too recognised this obvious facility. There is no prospect of doing business with Shamir, an ideologically driven politician who has had an intense acquaintance with both left and right-wing politics and arrived at his present position on the strength of long-held convictions.

Shamir is, above all, a great disappointment for the superpowers. Despite his position as leader of a right-wing party, Yitzhak Shamir is distrusted in Washington. The favoured American candidate for the premiership is Peres, a view shared in Moscow which took the first tentative steps to restoring diplomatic relations under Peres following the rupture in

1967 during the Six Day War.

The Americans are also rightly unconcerned about the 'socialist' tag which attaches itself to Peres's Labour Party, because of all the major parties in the Socialist International the Israeli Labour Party is probably the least representative of its working class. Ever since 1977 when Begin won a devastating election victory it has been clear that the right-wing Likud bloc are the authentic voice of Israel's Jewish workers, most of whom originate from Arab countries.

In the peculiar economic and ethnic structure which is today's Israel, the Labour Party represents the traditional vested interests and ruling elite. An uncharacteristically high proportion of the country's industry is out of the private sector; but it is not quite in the public sector either because it is run by powerful subsidiaries of the trade union movement which in turn is run by the Labour Party.

The majority of the Israeli Jewish population were born in, or originated from Arab countries. They arrived after the European Jews had settled and gathered the political institutions under their control. Although European predominance in political parties spreads across the spectrum from left to right, it was personified in the Labour Party which must have seemed as if it were destined to rule for ever.

Thus the working class opposition to the Labour Party gravitated to the right

and stayed there but not just for negative reasons. More importantly the Right offered a far more acceptable policy on the biggest issue: relations with the Palestinians and the Arab world in general. To Israel's naturally hawkish proletariat, many of whom were forced out of Arab countries into Israel, the Labour Party appeared to be dangerous.

**There is therefore absolutely no political mileage to be gained by Shamir adopting a more conciliatory attitude towards peace negotiations with Israel's neighbours and there is hardly a great deal of popular acclaim to be gained by Peres in pushing him along that road.** Peres could only exercise his carefully honed negotiating skills as prime minister.

The fact that many in the Arab world alongside the political leadership in Washington and Moscow want to see Peres back in a position of control is of little help to the ever flexible Labour leader. The Israeli public has been in a go-it-alone mood for some time. External endorsements are viewed with the deepest suspicion. On the other hand public opinion seems to have developed a strong appetite for coalitions so Peres and his supporters can expect a secure existence in the government unless either side has a brainstorm and insists on any radical departures from existing policy. Failing this Israelis are looking forward to a further period of the two 'S'es, stability and stalemate. ●

**'Shamir always seemed most at home in clandestine activity and the kind of politics which by-passed the democratic process'**



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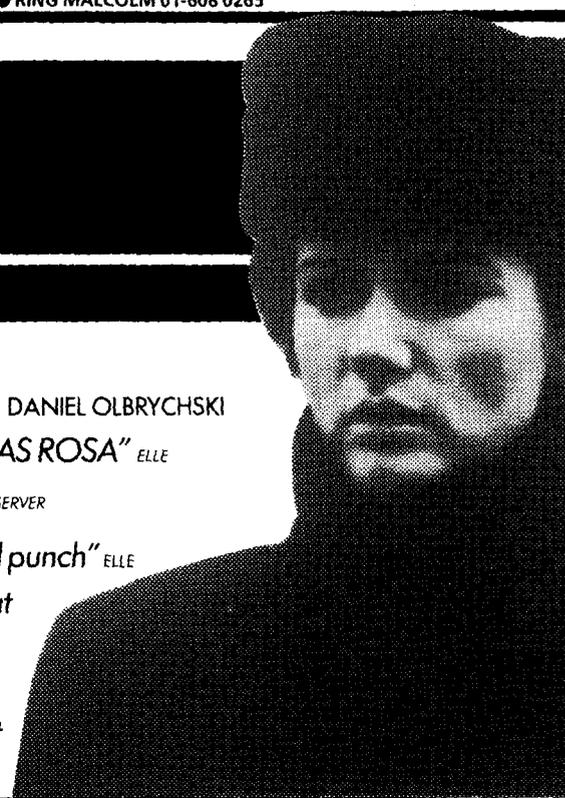
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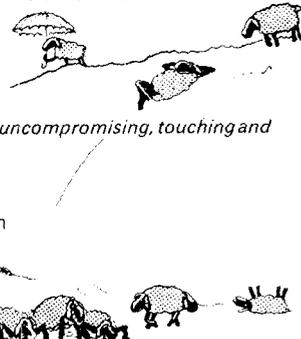
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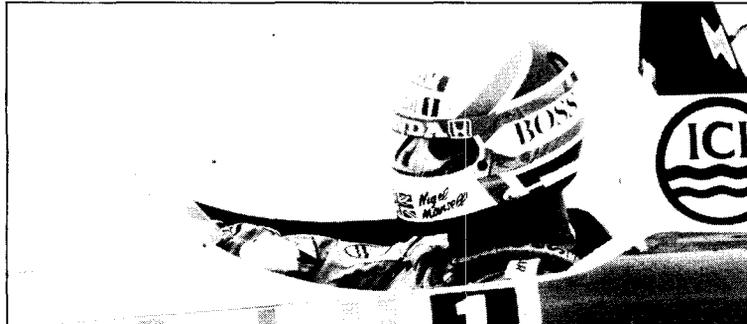
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## A Successful Formula



**Nigel Mansell: An unlikely hero who confounded the sceptics**

Grand prix driver Nigel Mansell is an unlikely motor racing champion. He neither looks nor sounds the part. His Brummie monotone belongs more to the Lucas Aerospace works where he was once an engineer, while his habit of bringing his wife and children to races doesn't fit the image of fast-living, jet-setting grand prix ace. Besides, Mansell, 32, shouldn't logically be champion. As number two driver in the Williams' grand prix team to Brazilian star Nelson Piquet, Mansell should be playing a supporting role – not regularly beating his higher-paid team mate.

Yet, that is precisely what Mansell has done this year – taking him within a gear-change of the world championship. With five victories under his belt at the time of going to press, Mansell had only to win one more race to be assured the title; a prospect which confounded the sceptics who have doubted his ability.

For Mansell has never been credited with the natural talent of former British world champions Jim Clark (his own hero) and Jackie Stewart – or even his own rivals for the title – Alain Prost, Ayrton Senna and Nelson Piquet. Rather, Mansell is seen as a gutsy trier – who in the past invariably tried too hard and ended up in the crash barriers. He has none of the financial advantages of some of his colleagues, financing his early racing by washing windows, while his wife Rosanne demonstrated gas cookers. He eventually sold everything to get into For-

mula 3 – the proving ground for aspiring grand prix stars. Once there, he didn't dominate the scene, like many of his current rivals such as Piquet – but instead performed well in uncompetitive cars.

By then he had broken his neck and badly injured his back in racing accidents. But his biggest break came when talent spotter Colin Chapman, the boss of Lotus cars offered him a formula one drive. Despite a good rapport with Chapman, errors outnumbered results, and after Chapman's death in 1982, Mansell's career nose-dived. 'When I was with Colin,' he says, 'things were very good but when he died, things changed. Colin handled many sections of the business himself – he could do it, because he had the power and charisma and the final say. But when he died, Lotus floundered for a couple of years.'

By good fortune, Mansell was offered the number two seat at Williams – a team which had itself been struggling with the advent of turbo-charged engines. Still, Mansell was noted more for his gaffes than his gifts – particularly by spinning off in front of the tv cameras while leading the Monaco Grand Prix. At the end of the 1984 season, the McLaren team had presented a comic video of Mansell's accidents and excuses at a victory celebration; and when it was announced that Mansell was to be his team mate, Williams' driver Keke Rosberg threatened to quit. 'The human being I can get along

with,' said the former world champion. 'The professional person I'm not so sure about'.

However, as Williams' design director Patrick Head points out, Williams was in the throes of adapting to turbo-engine technology, and badly needed a driver with turbo experience – which Mansell had with Lotus. 'I thought he was a driver very committed to working hard.'

Head's faith was rewarded – by the end of 1985 Mansell was winning at last, and his form continued spectacularly into 1986. Everyone agrees that Mansell is a changed man this year – success has brought a new confidence and image consciousness. He suffers fools politely, if not gladly, interviews are restricted to five minutes, he deftly switches caps mid-interview to please the sponsors, and he slips into a bizarre third person PR speak when talking about himself.

Who can blame him for playing the part? Ferrari has already offered him an alleged £1.5M to drive its cars next year, and McLaren, the team that two years ago made him the office party joke, has also been on the phone. Mansell has now resigned with Williams, for a rumoured £2m for two years.

Many paddock pundits argue that Mansell has simply been lucky to be in the right team – and car – at the right time. Mansell has always paid tribute to teamwork in an era of eight second stops for tyre changes, but insists: 'The driver's still got to do the job, he's still got to go out and win the race. The tyres stops are critical, because you can screw up during tyre stops, but it just involves the team a little bit more than they were before.' In answer to his critics, Mansell has made few mistakes this year – even under extreme pressure. In fact, it is star driver Piquet who has goofed more regularly than his number two. Success has, undoubtedly, changed him. It has made him hungry for more ●

Nick Newman

## The Spice of Life

A new series of six half-hour comedy programmes *Victoria Wood as seen on TV* starts this month. Michlene Wandour spoke to its originator, writer and performer, Victoria Wood, in rehearsals.

### Can we start at the beginning. Born . . .

Born Prestwich near Manchester, 1953. Grammar school, university. Television. Before I graduated from university I was a barmaid in a pub in Birmingham, and met someone who worked at the BBC who heard me playing the piano, and asked me to audition at Pebble Mill, which I did. I got a few odd little jobs singing songs on their regional programme on Friday nights. The first programme was a folk programme and I sang on that. Then they asked me to write songs specially for some of their other programmes. So by the time I left I already had an Equity card. You can't get them now for just being on the BBC, but you could at that time.

### You write and perform your own material. Have you done other people's stuff?

At university I was in lots of plays. But I've never wanted to really. It's just the way it's gone. I've always been writing something and then gone on to do it or getting it done. I'm not an actress, so I don't go round scouting for other people's things to do.

I would do something if I thought it was a great script. I'd do a part in a film or something if anybody asked me. I've just been offered a little part. I can't do it because I'm busy with this.

### When did you get married?

1980. We met in a play at Leicester. In 1976. Geoff was an actor then, he was in the show at the Leicester Phoenix playing Buffalo Bill. I was very out of work and they needed somebody to play the piano for the show for two weeks. A bit after that he decided to stop being an actor. And became a magician instead.