

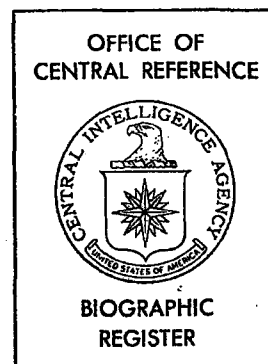
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UNITED KINGDOM

James Harold WILSON

Prime Minister and First Lord
of the Treasury

Harold Wilson became the youngest British Prime Minister in this century when the Labor Party, after 13 years in Opposition, won a narrow victory in the October 1964 general election. During his first year in office he met a series of financial and political crises with courage, confidence, patience, and imperturbability. Having established himself as a national leader, whom the country at large no longer regarded as a partisan Labor Prime Minister, Wilson and his party were returned to power with a substantial majority in the general elections of March 1966. Recently, however, a combination of political and economic setbacks at home and abroad have seriously reduced the morale and prestige of his government.



Elected party leader in February 1963, following the death of Hugh Gaitskell, Wilson successfully united Labor's diverse elements within a few months. Never a doctrinaire socialist, but rather a pragmatist, keenly aware of the realities and uses of power, Wilson, as Prime Minister, has shown the same managerial skill in his government appointments, placing moderates in key Cabinet posts, and assigning "leftists" to neutral positions. The juxtaposition has enabled him, with decreasing effectiveness, to keep control of his government and party, including those Laborites who object to his general support of US actions in Viet Nam, his "East of Suez" defense policy, his efforts to obtain British entry into the Common Market, and to the essentially conservative measures he has had to adopt on the domestic front because of Britain's economic problems. Although Wilson emerged from Labor's Annual Party Conference in October far less battered than most observers had expected, recent events have resulted in a new low in Labor's popularity as well as serious doubts regarding Wilson's effectiveness as the party's leader. A series of fall strikes, increasingly severe by-election defeats, unfavorable trade statistics that led to the recent devaluation of the pound sterling, Britain's latest rebuff in seeking Common Market membership and a growing opposition and independence among leading cabinet members resulting from [redacted] handling of the recent South African arms embargo issue have all combined to create a "crisis of confidence" in his leadership. Wilson has never been a party figure to inspire affection, warmth or spontaneous loyalty in the manner of Gaitskell, Attlee or Aneurin Bevan. His popularity during his first year or so in office arose from public faith in him as a shrewd, tough manager of events and men, and no one seemed very much concerned about his reputation for deviousness or other personal shortcomings, so long as he seemed to be successful. Today, however, following his party's recent setbacks, Wilson's worth as an electoral asset is for the first time in doubt. Although he still possesses a brilliant mind, a phenomenal memory and a debating skill and caustic wit which no Conservative can match, in terms of political leadership and popularity, Wilson has fallen behind Tory leader Edward Heath.

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James Harold WILSON (Cont'd.)

The son of an industrial chemist, Harold Wilson was born on 11 March 1916 in Yorkshire. He won scholarships to secondary schools and to Jesus College, Oxford, and taught economics at his university until World War II when he was drafted into the Civil Service. He resigned to contest the 1945 election, and won the Ormskirk seat for Labor (he now represents Huyton, Lancashire). In the Attlee Labor Government he held several junior ministerial posts, and in 1947 entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade when he was only 31. In Opposition he served as his party's chief spokesman on financial affairs and later on foreign affairs before he became leader. Raised as a Congregationalist, the Prime Minister is a man of simple tastes and habits. He shuns social life, and apparently has no close political "cronies." Apart from his family and politics, reading and golf are his chief interests. A short, stocky man, he smokes a pipe constantly, enjoys plain food, and drinks moderately (lager, bourbon whiskey). Wilson married Mary Baldwin, the daughter of a Congregationalist minister, in 1940. They have two sons

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15 January 1968

(b)(3)

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