

# Wilson Gains Popularity as Opposition Party Leader

By PETER KNOX  
United Press International  
London — Harold Wilson's appointment as leader of the opposition Labor party last Feb. 14 was a controversial one. Nearly half his fellow M.P.s voted against him, the press was lukewarm and the public largely indifferent.

Now, six months later, although he remains something of an unknown quantity, even his political enemies admit the wheel of fortune has turned kindly for the 47-year-old, pipe-smoking Wilson.

The party appears to have united firmly under his command, public opinion polls and by-elections have shown Labor is enjoying a run of high popularity, and the press generally has accepted him as a success.

Wilson has been helped by the misfortunes of the Conservative government of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Its troubles this year over security, the common market, the Profumo scandal and racketeering in slum properties have given Labor ready-made ammunition with which to go on the attack.

### Atmosphere Right

This was the type of political atmosphere that Wilson needed to consolidate his position. With signs for a Labor election victory so favorable not even anti-Wilson Laborites are in any mood to rock the boat.

When he stepped into the leadership in succession to Hugh Gaitskell, who died in office in January, Wilson knew the task ahead of him was formidable.

Gaitskell's reign over the party for eight years had been characterized by bitter fighting between left and right-wing factions, with Gaitskell right of center and Wilson left of it. One blazing row over unilateral disarmament had nearly wrecked its unity.

Gaitskell, largely by the force of his personality, managed to weld the party together in 1962 in preparation for the approaching general elections expected this year or early next.

### Fears Widespread

When Gaitskell died there were widespread fears that the old splits would break wide open again. These were heightened when Wilson ran for the leadership against the man who had been Gaitskell's deputy, George Brown.

Brown, a right-winger, had the support of a solid bloc of 100 trade unionists among the party's 249 voting M.P.s.

These men made no secret of their opposition to Wilson because of his record inside the party. They suspected his past flirtations with the left, and had doubts about his political reliability.

Wilson, a man of humble background who had won enough scholarships to pay his way through school and Ox-

ford university and emerge as a lecturer in economics, had become a cabinet minister under Clement Attlee in 1947 at the age of 31.

In 1951, however, he walked out of the cabinet together with the radical Aneurin Bevan in a row over the National Health Plan. This action got him tabbed as a militant and he had a long hard climb to get back into the center of the party.

### Not Close To Leader

It was against Wilson, too, that he had never been very close to Gaitskell, or the so-

called Gaitskellites who dominated the parliamentary committee of the party.

In his six months in office Wilson has been careful to avoid controversial statements or actions. This explains lingering doubt whether he is a man of firm conviction or more of an astute politician.

With only minor changes he has kept together the same team of front bench spokesmen that had served under Gaitskell. Where he did appoint new men he did not favor left or right.

Wilson has made it clear that he means no break in continuing the policy evolved by Gaitskell.

The two big internal issues that troubled Gaitskell were the fight over unilateral disarmament and the extent to which the party should encourage greater nationalization of industries.

The former problem has become rather outdated. With a general election looming, the latter is little spoken of. Labor M.P.s believe they have a good chance of winning and they don't want to frighten

off potential middle class supporters with talk of socialization.

Sensing the mood of the nation, Wilson has been playing it cool.

In television appearances giving party political broadcasts he has projected the image of a quiet family man.

Inside the party his tactics have been similar. In meetings of the "shadow cabinet" (as the inner group of parliamentary Labor leaders is called) he has adopted the committee method favored by Attlee.

In the past six months he has visited President Kennedy in Washington and Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow. Both men accorded him V.I.P. treatment as a potential British prime minister.

### Raised Eyebrows

Inevitably, Wilson's six months in office have not been entirely free of criticism. His decision last month not to attend the banquet for the controversial Greek royal visit on the grounds of a prior engagement caused some raised

eyebrows: Conservatives resented his harrying of Macmillan in the security debate; Some of his own M.P.s have been worried by his habit of divorcing his public from his private life so that he seldom entertains fellow Laborites.

In the final analysis Wilson, however, should feel content with his record. According to the public opinion polls Labor is still favored to win the next elections, the by-election results since he took office have been favorable for him, and the party shows a solid front.

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### Four American Copters Crash in South Viet Nam

Saigon —(UPI)— Four U. S. Army helicopters crashed in the Communist-infested jungles of South Viet Nam Wednesday, but all their crewmen were rescued and none of the machines fell into Red hands, military sources said today.

One of the 'copters is known to have been shot down by the Communists. The other crashes were ascribed to "engine failure."

Observer Wounded  
A Vietnamese observer in one of the helicopters was slightly wounded in a gunfight with Red guerrillas who tried to block the crew's escape. No American casualties were reported.

The Vietnamese was one of four men in a "Huey" helicopter armed with machine guns and rockets which crashed five miles north of the town of Ben Cat. The two American pilots and the crew chief of the 'copter stripped it of weapons, and all four fought their way to safety.

A rescue helicopter picked them up in a nearby clearing. The "Huey," damaged beyond repair, was destroyed after everything usable had been removed from it.

Others Recoverable  
Two H21 troop-carrier helicopters, flying protective cover for the downed "Huey," also crashed. None of their crewmen was injured, and both 'copters proved recoverable.

Another H21 was shot down by the Reds about 30 miles south of Banmethout in the central highlands. The crew landed safely and was rescued unhurt, and the 'copter will be repaired and flown out later.

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