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Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No. 10

Bernard Donoughue

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Early in 1974, Bernard Donoughue was invited by Harold Wilson first to help fight the General Election and then to found and run the Policy Unit at Number Ten Downing Street, a body independent of the Civil Service machine working solely for the Prime Minister. He thus joined Wilson’s notorious "kitchen cabinet" with Joe Haines—Wilson’s combative press secretary—and Marcia Williams, Wilson’s personal and private secretary. Donoughue remained in Downing Street throughout Wilson’s final premiership, and his daily diary provides an extraordinarily intimate portrait of Harold Wilson struggling to hold the Labour Party together, drinking heavily, increasingly paranoid about "plots" and the press, and apparently in thrall to Marcia Williams. Williams had an extraordinary hold over the Prime Minister and violently resented "intrusion" from any other advisors, Donoughue included. Though the story of Wilson’s "kitchen cabinet" has been told before, there has never been an account as intimate and explosive as this extraordinary diary. One of the most extraordinary accounts of modern times, this is an intimate and often explosive look at life at the heart of Harold Wilson's government.

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