

Britain's Harold Wilson: The Russophile at Number 10 Downing Street

By [Neil Clark](#)

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Imagine a British Prime Minister who was a Russophile, not a Russophobe, and defied US pressure to send UK troops to war. A British Prime Minister who worked for better relations with the East, visited Moscow, and was on good terms with Kremlin leaders.

Well, it might sound unlikely today, but forty years ago we had such a Prime Minister. In October 1974, Harold Wilson was puffing away merrily on his pipe celebrating his fourth election victory out of five.

Looking back at the Wilson era is instructive as it shows us how much British politics has changed for the worse since the 1970s.

Harold Wilson was a mainstream Labour Party politician of his time yet anyone espousing the sensible pro-mixed economy policies he put forward in the 1960s and 70s today would be denounced as a “*Stalinist*.” Ironically, at the time, the ultra-left accused Wilson- a man who extended nationalization and whose government increased the top rate of income tax to 83%- of being too right-wing!

On foreign policy too, Wilson's diplomatic, non-hawkish approach would be denounced as being akin to “*appeasement*”, and he'd be compared to Neville Chamberlain. Wilson always tried to understand the Russian perspective: today anyone expressing even the slightest support/defense for the Russian position on Ukraine for instance is routinely labeled a “*Putin apologist*” or “*Kremlin stooge*”, etc by neocon/faux left gatekeepers who hate Russia and its leader with an intensity that is bordering on the pathological. In Britain, as in America, over the last thirty odd years, the neocon lunatics have taken over the asylum.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, politics in Britain was in a far healthier state than it is today, as the success of Harold Wilson shows. A wider range of views were allowed to be expressed openly in public life, and our democracy was all the better for it.

Unlike today, there was genuine freedom of speech. Obnoxious “*witch-finders*” weren't hounding pundits and commentators who had the “*wrong*” views on foreign policy 24/7: it was an era when the reports of the great anti-war journalist John Pilger appeared on the front pages of our national newspapers.

Wilson was not the only leading politician of this period to be a Russophile. As I noted in an earlier [OpEdge piece](#) there were politicians who were sympathetic to the Moscow perspective from across the spectrum. You might have expected socialist politicians to be well-disposed towards a country called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but the flag-bearer of the true blue Conservative right, Enoch Powell, was a Russophile too. Powell

became a supporter of unilateral nuclear disarmament and warned that it was US imperialism, not Russia, which posed the greatest threat to the peace of the world. Today's Conservatives by contrast, have, by and large, become lackeys for that same US imperialism- as have leading Labour Party and Liberal Democrat figures.

Harold Wilson first went to Moscow to try and develop UK/Soviet trade when he was a minister in Clement Attlee's Labour government which had come to power in 1945. Although no communist, he saw, correctly, the great benefits to Britain of good trade links with the Soviet Union and with other countries in the communist bloc. "*The healthy development of trade between Eastern and Western Europe is an essential part of the program for European recovery. Politics do not enter into it,*" Wilson said. What a contrast to our Russophobic leaders today who are enthusiastically imposing sanctions on Russia which are clearly not in Britain's best economic interests.

Wilson, when in opposition, continued to make the case for greater east-west trade and even became a consultant to companies who were doing business in the Soviet Union.

When he became Prime Minister in 1964, and again in 1974, he consistently pursued policies of détente- and "*peaceful coexistence*" with the Soviet Union, as well as resisting US pressure to send British troops to the Vietnam War.

His biographer Philip Ziegler records that Wilson was "*ecstatic*" over the warm welcome he received on one visit to Moscow in 1975. Wilson wrote: "They laid themselves out in an unparalleled way by all the standard tests." Soviet Prime Minister Aleksey Kosygin said that the meeting with Wilson was "truly historic and.....a major factor in the history of Anglo-Soviet relations."

That year, 1975, saw the Helsinki Accords, which marked the high point of the era of détente. In this period in Britain, the hawks who wanted to wreck détente were treated with the contempt they deserved.

This was reflected not just in British politics, where hawks were marginalized figures, but in popular culture too.

The most popular British comedy double act of the Wilson era was Morecambe and Wise. In their 1965 film *The Intelligence Men "Eric and Ernie"* help military intelligence foil a plot by a sinister group called "*Schlecht*" whose aim is to sabotage a forthcoming visit to Britain by a Russian trade delegation. There's a plot to assassinate the lead ballerina in *Swan Lake* which our heroes manage to thwart.

It's interesting that in 1965, the baddies were an international gang of criminals trying to wreck British-Russian relations. Today, it's members of our governing circles who are doing that.

The marginalized Russophobe fanatics of yesteryear, who wanted to provoke a disastrous confrontation with the Soviet Union, are now in positions of power and influence. They're in government and they're writing newspaper columns. And it's those sensible voices who want friendly relations, and a genuinely constructive partnership with Russia as Harold Wilson did, who are marginalized.

Woe betides anyone who tries to set up a "*Friends of Russia*" group in Parliament. The

Conservative Friends of Russia group was subject to a nasty campaign of attacks by neocons and the faux-left and was eventually disbanded. We can have Parliamentary Friends of Israel, but not it seems *"Friends of Russia."* Harold Wilson, who was both a Zionist and a Russophile, would be turning in his grave.

But although the agents of *"Schlecht"* have taken over, there are good reasons for believing that their days are numbered.

For a start, Russophobia, as I highlighted [here](#), has no widespread support among the British public, despite the relentless anti-Russian, anti-Putin propaganda.

People remember how President Putin and Russia opposed plans for war on a secular government in Syria last summer, and realize that if the neocon warmongers had got their way and President Assad been forcibly toppled, ISIS would probably now be in control of the entire country. The campaign of lies and misinformation designed to get people to believe that there has been a Russian *"invasion"* of Ukraine has also backfired, with much of the *"official narrative"* unraveling. In any case, there is little, or no, public appetite for a war to be fought over Ukraine, as much as that might please the Russophobic neocon fanatics who can't seem to get enough of bloodshed- even after Iraq and Libya.

Economic factors too need to be taken into consideration. As Liam Hannigan points out in his new Spectator [article](#) sanctions on Russia have hit Western European economies hard. Not only that, there's the looming financial collapse of Ukraine to take into account too.

"Kiev is in a deep financial hole and fast heading towards financial meltdown. Unless an extremely large bailout is delivered soon, there will be a default, sending shockwaves through the global economy. That's a risk nobody wants to take - not least in Washington, London or Berlin," Halligan writes. In July, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond [warned](#) that sanctions on Russia would hit the UK economy, saying "you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."

Inevitably, British businesses which are losing out due to the sanctions, will be trying, with justification, to lobby the government to change course, and the neocon Russophobes who want to extend sanctions will find they have some powerful enemies.

Also, there's been the success of politicians and parties who have dared to take a different line on Russia, which we saw again in this year's European [elections](#).

Certainly moving away from the phony elite consensus on Russia and Ukraine hasn't done Nigel Farage and his UKIP party's electoral fortunes much harm, nor has it dented the popularity of Respect Leader George Galloway, who now has a staggering 225,000 followers on Twitter.

It's clear that Russophobia is a complete dead end for Britain. While some obsessed media commentators may want hostilities to continue, thankfully fewer and fewer people are reading their *"Why Putin is the New Hitler"/"Russia poses a threat to the world"* columns and leader articles. We don't have to read their tripe any more as we have the internet, and other sources of news and comment.

Harold Wilson showed that British Prime Ministers don't have to follow Russophobia. If

Britain didn't have a trade war with the Soviet Union in the middle of the old "Cold War," then why do we have sanctions on Russia today? The reason for that is that our politics have been hijacked by a group of people who are following an anti-Russian agenda that's been set in Washington and which is not in Britain's national interest.

It's time for a new, genuine reset in British/Russian relations and for the Russophobic hawks to once again be treated as the fanatics and extremists they always were.

Let's get back to the 60s and 70s, the era which Harold Wilson dominated. It's not only the music which was much better then, but the foreign policy too.

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