

Theresa's 'baby faced assassin'

By [Will Leafe](#), Deputy Politics Editor (2016/17)

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Image: Number 10

FEW WILL HAVE heard of Gavin Williamson. Many, however, will know of Armando Iannucci's BBC political satire and cult hit, *The Thick of It*. Even those who have not experienced the biting, reportedly accurate and swear word-a-sentence comedy, which is based upon the dealings of former Labour Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell, will probably still know the name Malcolm Tucker. He is once described in the programme as the "The Heart of Darkness".

Gavin Williamson, not a fictional character, but Theresa May's Chief Whip, is the epitome of the silent assassin. He hides in plain sight on the Commons front benches, at May's side in press shots and public appearances, few ever noticing his presence. His power, however, cannot and should not be underestimated.

Having been awarded a CBE in Cameron's resignation honours, the MP for South Staffordshire is in fact a Yorkshireman, hailing from seaside town Scarborough. A proremain campaigner in the EU referendum, Williamson was called out by speaker John Bercow in 2013 for being too noisy during Prime Minister's Questions, and was told that his role was simply to "nod his head" and "fetch and carry notes".

Williamson's rapid rise to the top of politics, having only been elected an MP in the 2010, brings to mind parallels with the career trajectory of Edward Heath, whose appointment as Chief Whip in 1955 was a key event in his ascension to becoming Prime Minister. In his role as Cameron's right-hand man and now May's whip, Williamson will have gained the confidence of a large band of backbenchers. Perhaps one of the more well-known Conservative backbenchers, Jacob Rees-Mogg, said of Williamson: "he's a thoroughly good egg."

However, an unnamed Tory MP, newly elected in 2015, described him as "nice and cuddly on the outside, but actually a bit of a bully", describing how some of the Conservative MPs are "a bit afraid" of him. This intimidating perception of Williamson may simply be one that comes with the role; MPs are unlikely to think of someone who may force them to vote in opposition to their views as someone with a softly-softly approach.

During his stint in the pottery industry, before his entrance into politics, Williamson's nickname was "the baby-faced assassin", one which he gained through a renowned ruthlessness when faced with the big

decisions which would have a bearing on his firm's survival.

Mr Williamson hit the headlines towards the end of 2016 after it was reported that he keeps a pet tarantula named Cronus on his office desk in the Commons. Those familiar with Greek mythology will recognise that Cronus is the Greek God who castrated his father and ate his children. The Tories' Chief Whip had broken parliamentary rules, with the only animals allowed on the estate being guide and security dogs. He refused requests to move it, later describing the spider as 'part of his team', commenting that "you have to look at different ways to persuade people to vote with the Government." The man himself has never rebelled against the party leadership.

Back in 2014, I was on work experience in Westminster with one of my local MPs. Whilst I was assisting with constituency letters, Williamson himself walked in, sat down and requested a coffee. I didn't recognise him and hadn't heard of him, but that didn't matter. The man had a distinctive ability to silently command a room as soon as he entered it. I dared not speak, move or do anything out of turn in his presence, and I was later told by another MP this: "that's Gavin. He is the one really running the country." Williamson took out his phone, opened up Amazon and asked the room: "should I order one of the House of Cards books or all three?"



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