

Daily Telegraph, 28 Sep 2010

## Yes, Prime Minister, Gielgud Theatre, London, review

**A telling satire on the unscrupulousness of government, this updated stage version of the TV sitcom reduces its audience to helpless hilarity.**

**Rating: \* \* \* \***

By [Charles Spencer](#)

Published: 10:46AM BST 28 Sep 2010



Photo: Emily Joyce (Claire), David Haig (PM Jim Hacker) and Jonathan Slinger (Bernard) in 'Yes, Prime Minister'

For reasons that escape me, this updated stage version of the beloved TV sitcom received some grudging reviews when it opened in Chichester last May. I can only report that the show reduced me to helpless hilarity then, and did so all over again now it has transferred to the West End. Nor was I alone, with great waves of laughter rolling round the Gielgud.

The show's writers, Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, are as bang on the money as ever, while those superb actors David Haig and Henry Goodman make the roles of the PM and his cabinet secretary, formerly played by the much-missed Paul Eddington and Nigel Hawthorne, entirely their own.

Admirably topical – Hacker is hanging on by his fingernails in a coalition government with the economy in ruins – the show is nearer the knuckle than the TV version. Hacker's only hope of staying in power is securing a lucrative pipeline project with a dodgy oil-rich country called Kumranistan. Unfortunately its foreign minister insists that the deal will only go ahead if an underage teenage prostitute is sent to his room at Chequers.

The moral wriggling and rising panic that Haig's Hacker displays as he tries to persuade himself that this is the right thing to do for the country is both hilarious and a telling satire on the unscrupulousness of government. And when Hacker instructs his colleagues to get down on their knees and pray for divine guidance, the piece achieves one of those blissful peaks of great farce when it becomes physically impossible to stop laughing.

Full of cracking one liners – "Power abhors a vacuum and we are currently led by one" Sir Humphrey tartly observes of his panicky prime minister – the show includes wonderful material on the grandiosity of the BBC and the dangers of the tabloid press. My only real complaint is that the

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character of the PM's special adviser (Emily Joyce) is so unpersuasively written.

Haig switches from insufferable smugness to carpet-chewing panic in the blink of an eye in Lynn's sharp, handsomely designed production, while Henry Goodman brings a delicious hauteur and glib fluency to Sir Humphrey. Jonathan Slinger is also a nerdy delight as the private secretary, Bernard, wrestling with his conscience as the country heads towards hell in a handcart. I just hope our present coalition doesn't go the same way.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8029511/Yes-Prime-Minister-Gielgud-Theatre-London-review.html>