

The Stage

Yes, Prime Minister

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Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn have transformed their successful television comedy into an hilarious new play, lovingly directed at great pace by Lynn on a traditional Chichester set.

Henry Goodman (Sir Humphrey) and David Haig (Prime Minister Hacker) in Yes, Prime Minister at Chichester Festival Theatre Photo: Manuel Harlan

The scenario remains similar, with premier Jim Hacker being dependent upon the machinations of Sir Humphrey and his private secretary, Bernard. The differences lie in the appearance of a female special advisor and the context, which identifies a minority government and a global economic meltdown, with a possible salvation coming from building an oil pipeline from a country in Central Asia. However, this involves political compromise over relationships with the EU and a personal moral dilemma if the request of that country's foreign minister is to be met. Add in today's "opiate of the people" in the form of global warming, relationships with the BBC and illegal immigrants and the recipe is complete.

Sir Humphrey, beautifully played by Henry Goodman, with long soliloquies to give him thinking time when under pressure, is the epitome of the grand mandarin. Prime minister Hacker is played by David Haig with great vigour and pseudo-confidence, which becomes transparent when he is faced with a decision. The idea of using evil to overcome evil is almost too much for him. The special advisor, a very streetwise character in the hands of Emily Joyce, shows how easy it is for third parties to complicate matters. Rubber-faced Jonathan Slinger makes Bernard a lovable character of high moral rectitude but little confidence - a finely balanced performance. Sam Dastor gives a charming cameo as the Kumranistan ambassador.

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