



The Funny Thing About...

The Funny Thing About...Politicians

Interviewer:

Can you name the President of Chechnya?

Bush:

No can you?

Interviewer:

And the Prime Minister of India?

Bush:

The new Prime Minister of India is...err..no.

Tony Blair:

A day like today, I mean it's not a day for the soundbites. I feel the hand of history upon our shoulder.

Richard Heffernan:

Most politicians are funny unintentionally. Margaret Thatcher had no sense of humour. She famously on one occasion speaking of her deputy Willie Whitelaw...

Richard Heffernan:

Said that Willie was so great that every Prime Minister needs a Willie.

Jim Hacker:

When you give your evidence to the think tank are you going to support my view that the Civil Service is overmanned and feather bedded or not? Yes or no? Straight answer.

Sir Humphrey: Well, Minister, if you ask me for a straight answer then I should say as far as we can see, looking at it by and large, taking one time with another, in terms of the average of departments then in the final analysis, it is probably true to say that at the end of the day in general terms, you would probably find that not to put to fine a point on it there probably wasn't very much in it one way or another. As far as one can see. At this stage.

Jim Hacker:

Is that yes or no?

Richard Heffernan:

Civil servants are part of the political process.

Sir Humphrey:

Yes and no.

Richard Heffernan:

Because they are the keepers of knowledge and know how things are done, they can be very obstructive and that was Sir Humphrey's power. He knew how to do things.

Richard Heffernan:

In one politics course we look at how institutions determine the way in which political actors operate. Civil servants in the 50's, 60's and 70's were very much wedded to a traditional way of governing. And so, ministers who came in and wanted to change things would have found it slightly difficult to push their agenda.

Things have changed dramatically since then. The ethos of the civil service is to say “yes minister” and mean yes minister. That changed in the 80s largely due to the Thatcher government and also subsequently the Major and Blair governments where the civil service began to appreciate that they would benefit themselves by doing what it was their political principles, ministers wanted them to do.

Nicola Murray: The data loss wasn't my fault.

Special advisors are extremely powerful if they work for powerful ministers.

Malcolm Tucker:

Should I just go and talk to the boss? Should I go and tell him “I don't think she's up to the job”.

Nicola Murray:

You said yourself that if he sacks me after a week it looks like he's f**ked up.

Malcolm Tucker:

Yeah but that was before when you're only problem was a f**cking s**t pun in a newspaper and a face like Dot Cotton licking p**s off a nettle.

Richard Heffernan:

Tucker is powerful for and on behalf of the Prime Minister.

Nicola Murray:

OK. OK. I'll take every bit of advice you give me. I'll go on Question Time wearing a push up bra and a fez. I'll do the hustings on stilts if that's what you tell me the strategy is because you know about that stuff Malcolm I know that.

Richard Heffernan:

He has an expertise we are led to believe in media management so people trust him to manage the media and to deal with crises and persuade the media to see the politics as the politician wants politics to be seen.

Malcolm Tucker:

But it involves you, my dear, eating a complete concrete mixer full of humble pie.

Richard Heffernan:

All the political stories that happened in the history of the Blair government between 1997 and 2003. Alastair Campbell, his special advisor, was at the heart of every single story...

Richard Heffernan:

He was Blair's right hand man. He does presentation but also he does policy and every single Cabinet minister his diaries demonstrate go to him for advice and assistance and help.

Richard Heffernan:

Getting the story out is the way in which you govern by using the news media 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Richard Heffernan:

Ed Miliband who is the present Labour leader began his life as a special advisor.

Richard Heffernan:

David Cameron was a special advisor, worked for Michael Howard in the Treasury. Nick Clegg was a special advisor working for Leon Brittan in the European Commission. It's now a career track into politics.
Music in

Richard Heffernan:

Because media management is so essential a part of the modern politicians' armoury they invest enormous effort in news management.

John Prescott: Bear in mind that something like 70 to 80% of the actual demand are single parent households or single youngster households or people who are living in a single house. Can we do that again? I made that c**p.

Interviewer: Sorry we're live at the moment Mr Prescott.