

This is fake news:

Humphrey: This fake news has to stop and we are going to be the ones who have to stop it. As it is information or possibly misinformation has proliferated around the internet while our reliance and faith in Google or Wikipedia has grown to dependence. It's a dangerous state of affairs when people trust wholeheartedly news or information which may not be true.

Bernard: Quite so, but what can we do about it? It is quite a complicated problem. Who is to be the arbiter of what is fact and what is fiction? The task would be too daunting for any government to undertake, surely?

Humphrey: Yes, Bernard, but we have to at least have the power to do something, even if we have not the means to do it. The power alone would discourage those who would deliberately spread fake news.

Bernard: But, do we not have legislation in place to deal with defamation, invasion of privacy, hate crime and terrorism?

Humphrey: And sedition.

Bernard: Of course. My mistake. And sedition.

Humphrey: Yes we do. But we face a different kind of threat. We are under siege from technology and the people.

Bernard: The people who vote for us?

Humphrey: The people don't vote for us, they vote for the politicians.

Bernard: Whom we work for.

Humphrey: Pedantry Bernard? In this quagmire of misinformation and chaos, the people need order, direction, a guide, without

which they would be lost, unable to decide whom to believe, to put their trust in.

Bernard: Absolutely Sir Humphrey. We've got to limit the proliferation of fake news. So often a rebuttal only fans the flames. We should encourage scrutiny. We should present the facts and let the people come to their own conclusions. We should fight misinformation with greater transparency and more accurate information. That would enable the people to make up their own minds.

Humphrey: Certainly not Bernard! Let the people make up their own minds? Have you gone mad? There would be chaos, they would be lost, unable to decide whom to believe, to put their trust in. We are their guide, Bernard, their beacon. Can you imagine the people thinking for themselves? Parliament would be perpetually hung. Wait... That might be interesting. No. Too unpredictable. Where was I? Parliament would be hung. Yes, we would have a freer hand in policy but just imagine how capricious policy might become as the politicians pander to their constituencies? And the scrutiny Bernard. How can one make policy or execute policy in the face of such scrutiny? Policy is not a simple thing, it relies on trial and error. If we were critiqued for every failure, every blind alley, policy would be paralyzed. No no no no. We need to be able to lead in peace without the constant grumblings of the people driving us to distraction and policy errors. So important a function as government needs calm, calculated and thoughtful consideration which would evaporate in a crescendo of complaint and dissent. It would be impractical. Impossible.

Bernard: But do we not do the will of the people, Sir Humphrey?

Humphrey: Bernard, Bernard, Bernard. If we did so, we would be mere populists. Is that wise?

Bernard: With respect, we appear to be populists every 5 years

Sir Humphrey.

Humphrey: And where has that got us? Pandering to the people has led us some of the most misguided policies in the history of the government. The trains. A shambles. It was impossible to run a rail system at those prices, turn a profit and invest in maintenance and improvements. Three incompatible objectives which we failed to present properly to the people. Our reliance on financial services. The City is the economy. No more manufacturing, no more industry, no mining, no steel, no auto industry, unless you count the Chelsea tractors for the rich and aimless, no diversity. We are a hedge fund Bernard. And not a very good one.

Bernard: With respect Sir Humphrey, that's not entirely true.

Humphrey: Are you calling me a purveyor of fake news? How dare you Bernard.

Bernard: Well, last week in the PM's office you did say that the idea was not to stop fake news but to monopolize it.

Humphrey: Never said it. Wasn't there. I believe Bernard, that you're spreading fake news.