

# Facebook's Zuckerberg Ignores 'The New Reality' By Skipping Fake News Inquiry In London

A chair never looked so empty as it did for Mark Zuckerberg on Tuesday.

A special "Grand Committee" of nine governments from around the world had come together at the U.K. Houses of Parliament, hoping to ask Facebook's founder about the spread of fake news on his platform.

They were armed with explosive new information, a [trove of documents](#) obtained by British lawmakers suggested Zuckerberg's management team had been alerted as far back as 2014 about the the scale of data harvesting by Russian actors.

But lawmakers didn't get the man with 60% of Facebook's voting shares and thus ultimate control; they got [Richard Allen](#), Facebook's vice president of public policy for Europe.

That was a bad idea, according to Casper Klynge, the world's first "tech ambassador" for a nation state, in this case Denmark. "The new reality is if you're the CEO of a big tech company, you simply cannot refuse to participate in these public hearings." Klynge is a career diplomat who over the course of two years at his unique post has met with management at Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Alibaba and Tencent, to be the "eyes and ears" for his own lawmakers back in Denmark.

"It's no different to if you were a traditional company. If you're called, you're expected to show up," he added of Zuckerberg. "That's the new normal and the new reality, and some companies need to better understand that."

Facebook, which recently hired former British politician Nick Clegg to become its head of PR and public policy, is experiencing strained relations with governments of late.

Politicians initially from the U.K. and Canada had written to Zuckerberg earlier this year, imploring him to attend the hearing of an "international grand committee," in London on 27 November to give evidence on the lead-up to the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the spread of disinformation. Facebook declined the invitation multiple times, which [politicians decried](#) as "disappointing" and "dismissive."

The weekend brought a dramatic twist: British parliamentarians recently [obtained a trove of confidential emails](#) between app developer Six4Three and Facebook management. Among the cache of documents was evidence of a warning from a Facebook engineer to management in 2014, that Russia was harvesting three billion data points from Facebook users each day.

Tuesday's grand committee has not been alone in its struggle to get face time with the biggest decision-makers in Silicon Valley. "It's hard to find an entry point in these

companies,” says Klynge, who typically reaches out to the No. 2 or No. 3 executive in a company to talk about Denmark’s concerns around privacy and fake news. “They’re not used to having governments wanting to have conversations with them. There’s a little bit of skepticism and some resistance.”

Day to day, that simply means that emails and phone calls go unanswered. “With some big companies it’s been an eight-to-nine-month struggle to get access to the right people to have these conversations.”

Klynge hopes that recent scandals around privacy and data protection will spur Big Tech companies like Facebook to give lawmakers and ambassadors time for dialogue. Among the things he’d like to suggest is building ethics into programming, something akin to a Hippocratic oath for coders. “We’re not putting companies before countries,” Klynge says, “but keeping countries in the equation.”

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