

LETTER

FROM

EPHESUS

Dandy Andy

Diana Simmonds

Mock election campaigns are a damned fine idea. We've just had one, you might recall, and it really showed that we're still up there at the forefront, at the very cutting edge, of innovative ways to spend public money - at a time of economic decrepitude - and still whistle it off with a hey nonny nonny.

We speak, of course, of Andrew Peacock and his VIP-planeload of advisers, observers, journos and sundry other junket junkies who jetted around five states and God knows how many party sausage sizzles, to brighten up the wintry month of August.

And laid back-she'll be right-give the bloke a go-never mind the interest rates-can you see the facelift scars? as we are, nobody thought for a moment to ask how much it might be costing us - nor why we should foot the bill.

As Mr. Peacock so lubriciously puts it, "it's not fair". But then, as Paul (Sexpot) Keating might say, "Neither was Jack Johnson's bum".

While the non-sporting types among us are working that one out, let's reflect, for a moment, on what we gained from the Opposition leader's mock-pretend-let's-play-grown-ups exercise. For starters, the trip was described as a "dress rehearsal" and it has undoubtedly perked up our dress awareness no end.

Have you noticed how extra dapper is the Prime Minister since Dandy Andy flashed anew across the nation's telly screens? Not that Bob's a slob, far from it; but the PM's pale

grey suit with silver grey tie and off-white shirt (speech to Commonwealth Foreign Ministers) was a triumph of quiet elegance. He also consistently manages to avoid Andy's unfortunate sleazy gigolo look - even though the latter has forsaken whatever tanning policy he was once slave to - and this must be a major election plus for the ALP. Then there's the gradual metamorphosis of the Treasurer into a recognisable media type: the sex symbol.

Let's face it, Paul was always a bit of a thinking woman's think object. What could be more of a turn-on while standing in the booth ready to mark your ballot paper, than the image of an intelligent, sensually good looking, arts-loving, sensitive toughie who - sigh - knows when it's time to put the cue in the rack. Wayne (Lightning) Truscott, eat your Niblick.

And while the non-sporting types ponder that one, let's reflect on what else we have gained from the Peacock flying exercise ... um ... well ... ah ... perhaps the answer is that to err is human, but to um and er is divine, which could at least explain why Bob Hawke continues to be so popular with the punters and why Andrew still finds it so hard to do sincerity and get away with it.

Nevertheless, exposing himself to the faithful at our expense seems to have paid off, if opinion polls are to be believed.

Before the flight of the phoenix, even the least liberal Liberals had significant misgivings about a leader who appeared to have the substance of a re-risen soufflé. It seems, however, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating: they have now nibbled and quite like the flavour. More important, he has gone some way towards banishing memories of the nasty taste left by the plotting and shafting of little Johnny Applecake. And that's dangerous. Bob and Paul have been dishing out some pretty vile-tasting stuff of late and there's probably more to come. It's arguable that their prescription for economic ills is almost as bad as the disease, but watching Andy and his flying circus dodge and weave to avoid 'fessing up

to the precise ingredients in their own patent remedies, waiting - we are assured - in toxic splendour in the policy pantry back at Lib HQ, makes the blood run cold.

If the poor, the elderly, the mortgaged and the disaffected think that Bob and Paul have been kicking where it hurts, what can be envisaged from the party whose manifesto makes bashing the defenceless mandatory?

They might, of course, have a better position on missionaries. The Hawke government - and Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in particular - have been shown to be utterly heartless when it comes to missionaries. Not only have they done nothing to stop these arrogant fools swanning off to ridiculous places to 'save the little people', but when the little people turned out to be little more than revolting natives, Senator Evans failed to divert our massive military force, code-named Kangaroo 89, from its exercises and mount a rescue operation.

Not only that, but he didn't (as the Opposition leader might have done if he'd thought of it) avail himself of the nearest RAAF plane and fly immediately to the spot. He could learn a thing or two from British PM Thatcher (as we all could, of course). There is nary a crisis too small to stop this Mother Theresa of the Free Market jetting in for a spot of sympathy and picturesque photo opportunities.

Why wasn't Senator Evans directing operations at Davao? Why didn't the PM offer himself to Mrs. Aquino as a substitute? Why didn't Derryn Hinch get tragic exclusives with the child-molesting missionary slayers in that hell-hole prison? And does that boorish bore Tony Greig still think Allan Border's team is the worst ever to leave these shores? Or was it just that, for once, Mrs Thatcher failed to recognise a shocking accident and didn't rush to the scene to offer backbone and her priceless advice on how to bat oneself out of a sticky wicket?

The public has the right to know. We must be told - and before the next election if possible.