

Cartoon Capers

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NASA administrators are reported to be considering sending trainee astronauts to Australia to see if they can survive a month and a half locked up in a federal election campaign.

Tomorrow, the five week festival of clichés that has passed for an election campaign concludes. The absence of any real personalities must have been the reason for the parade of former leaders and old campaign footage but it reached the point when one wondered if perhaps they'd start exhuming bodies. It might have been more exciting. Both leaders began by saying they would be extremely "lean and mean", avoiding all substantial monetary handouts. It took them both about a day and half to work out that this wasn't what the voters wanted at all.

The violence inflicted on the English language has been pitiless with never-ending slogans about twelve billion dollar holes, forwards movement and stopping non-existent tides of illegal migrants (who as refugees would be legal, anyway, if they existed in anywhere near the numbers suggested). Orwell said "alter the language and you can alter the way they think". Thus we hear Julia Gillard (intriguingly called "Gilliard" quite often by ABC TV newsreaders in the first days of the campaign) telling 7.30 Report viewers on August 3 "I'd rather urge on the side of confidentiality". "Dead, buried and cremated", said Tony Abbott of his party's erstwhile industrial relations policy. How about stuffed, mounted and mummified, too, just for good measure? "Two weeks to go, now you'll see the real me", Gillard announced a fortnight ago but no-one seems to have noticed the difference.

In the manicured doorstep interviews there was always a minder or minister in sunglasses nodding sagely just behind the leader. But why did the leader need a hard hat and safety shirt, whilst the poor old minder got none? In the on-again-off-again debates (the word is used loosely), both leaders were scrupulously scripted and the legitimate third leader, the Greens' Bob Brown, successfully kept well away from everything. It was a kaleidoscope of suburban selfishness with not a word about the significant foreign policy issues facing this nation and nothing at all about the major internal dilemmas confronting Australia. Just the usual handouts, baby kissing and sandbagging. The wonder, really, is why this insulting quadrennial charade is considered even remotely acceptable.

Two people nailed it. Cheryl Kernot, early in the campaign, asked why we have to go through this turgid process. "Five weeks of being shouted at and promised the earth, all for the sake of a few people who weren't paying attention anyway. Once the election is decided, let's just have it the next day". And Hugh McKay put on record for the 7.30 Report this week the complete absence of any central vision from either side amongst the "dribbled out" bits and pieces of policies.

God save us from the phodo finishes, the ford estimates and the risk adverse initiatives. To borrow an old slogan, it's time - time this insulting cartoon strip election campaign was put out of its misery. In the land where comedy is king the only option, really, was to laugh at it. That always happens but few punches were pulled this time. Some of it was quite humorous, too, but it's hard to sustain over five weeks. The only ones who

managed it were John Clarke and Bryan Dawes with their hilarious satires interviewing the average voter. They concluded last night with a spoof on the Mastermind quiz, with Mr Voter (Clarke) winning the ultimate prize, "the government you deserve". "Bugger it, I was hoping for a slightly better result than that", he said. "There isn't one", said Dawes.