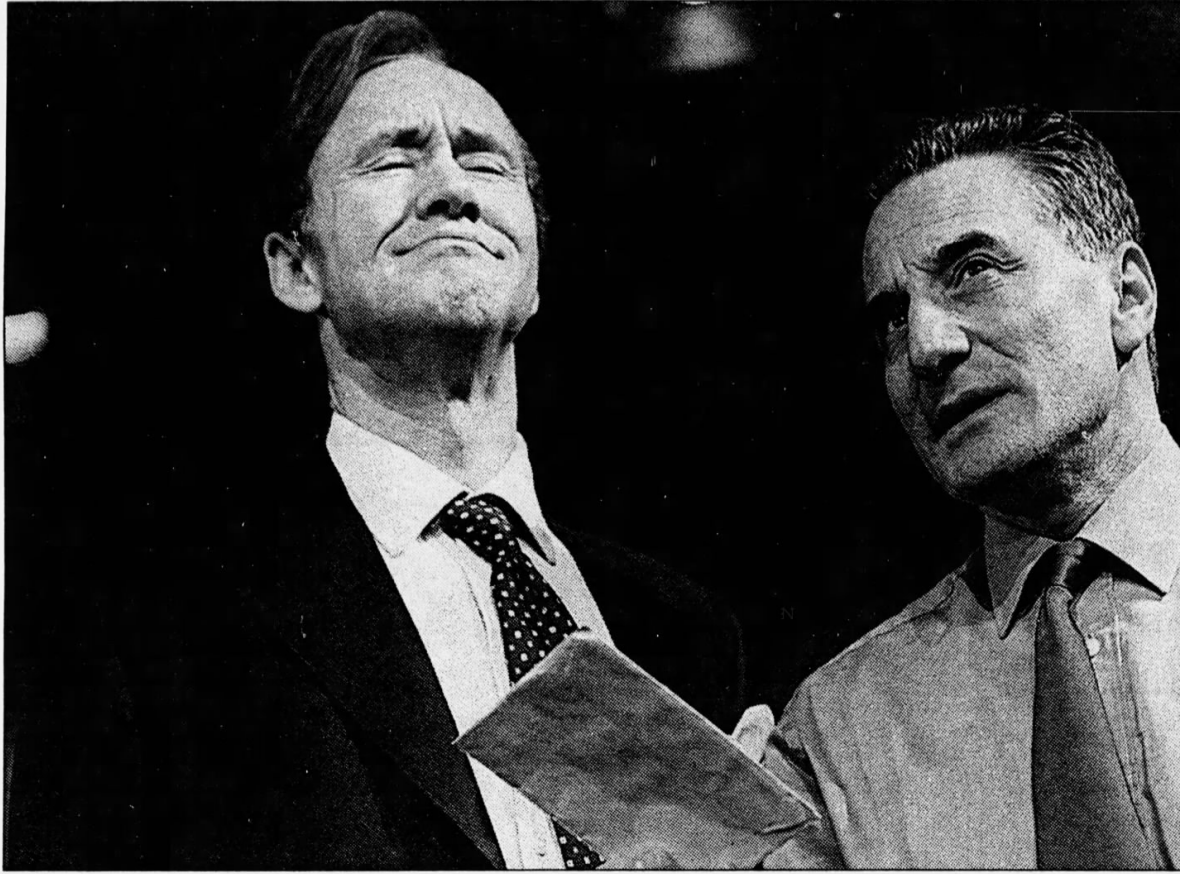




Alastair Muir

Yes, Minister: Nigel Planer and Henry Goodman in *Feelgood*

Sizzling satire on Number 10

POLITICAL satire was joyfully restored to the stage last night, when a Prime Minister, his methods and his Downing Street spokesman, were held up to ridicule and mockery. It was crystal-clear that though the Premier was identified only as "DL" and the spokesman as "Eddie" that Mr Blair and a devilish amalgam of Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson were the play's real targets. Will our Prime Minister ever be able to look the nation straight in the face again, now that his cult of sincerity and priggishness has been so lethally sent up by his latest impersonator: Nigel Cooke's PM ogles us with the come-on of mock-modesty.

Feelgood's author, Alistair Beaton, who has already vented his spleen against politicians in *Spitting Image*, has cooked up a sizzling political farce. It's true that Beaton's satire, written from an old Labour perspective, levels a hackneyed attack upon the Blair administration, accusing it of an obses-

sion with presentation at the expense of policy, of media manipulation and suppressing all internal party dissent. Yet this witty lampoon, despite the far-fetched resolving of its crisis, is driven by the force of a scandal that rings funny, familiar bells.

The scene is a hideously floral hotel-room during a Labour Party conference, where the press supremo, Henry Goodman's Eddie, is pulling all the strings as if the Labour Party were his puppet. Eddie is the play's comic focus. He's a fanatic intriguer in a hurry, the fixer who wants to be the controller, a foul-mouthed bully who knows all the secrets, but uses charm as his secret

weapon. When a languid cabinet office minister admits that his secretly cultivated GM hops have ended up as a beer that produced breasts in some men and shrunk penises in others, Eddie's rage, panic and sarcasm are a joy to behold.

It takes too long for this scandal to be airborne, despite Max Stafford-Clark's swift, beautifully tuned production. But the play takes wing, with the PM's newly discovered young gag-writer and Eddie's lefty former wife, a finely scathing Sian Thomas, caught up in the frantic manipulations. Despite some farcical overkill, *Feelgood* scores sharp satirical points at the expense of Labour hypocrisy and double-dealing. Nigel Planer's silly-ass cabinet minister amuses, while Goodman's Eddie, all nervous vitality and spitting vituperation, is a razzle-dazzle comic triumph. A satirical treat to savour.

● Until 10 March. Box office: 020 7722 9301.

FEELGOOD ★

Hampstead Theatre

Nicholas de Jongh