

Politics

By Gibson Nolte

Here at Loop we love a bit of politicking, especially when it leads, as it so often does, to vastly improved wage conditions, triumphs of social justice and complimentary doughnuts for freelance writers. So imagine our mounting joy as news of the U.S. presidential nomination campaigns and Australia's looming Federal election sends surges of political reportage splashing all over our newspapers, television and computer screens. So great is this joy that here, for your reading pleasure, is a piece devoted solely to politics! What fun!

Now before you go folding Loop away, muttering that, although you have to vote, you aren't really a 'political person,' bear in mind that the fact that you're even reading street press is a political act. In fact, according to Aristotle in his 350BC classic 'Politics' (which you can read in its entirety at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>, by the way), just being human is a political act. So there. Anyway, in light of our forthcoming Federal election, it may be wise to take a few minutes to bone up on exactly how our country's political system works. If you need a bit of a brush up one of the best places to go is www.AustralianPolitics.com, an exhaustive site loaded with pretty much everything you need to know about our political systems, laws, constitution and policies. There's also a political news archive stretching back a decade.

Of course, becoming actively political rather than passively political is a choice. And if you want to be actively political you really should know where you stand on certain issues, so you can argue in chat rooms and then vote in an appropriate manner. A list of political parties operating around the world (including most of their web sties) can be found at www.psr.keele.ac.uk/parties.htm. Surprisingly there are over 30 listed as operating in Australia and not one of them promises free doughnuts to writers! The wonderful Oz Politics Blog (www.ozpolitics.info/blog/) has an online test you can take to determine which major Australian political party most accurately represents your point of view. While still in it's beta stages, the test (which you get to by clicking the 'Politics Test' link on the homepage) presents 50 questions which you answer using a 6-point scale of agreement. After analysing your answers the site lets you know which way you should be voting. If you're into comparing results, similar tests are available at www.selectsmart.com/FREE/select.php?client=australia and at <http://www.news.com.au/feature/0,,5012863,00.html>.

For a different, arguably more interesting, take on political leanings, you may find the test at www.PoliticalCompass.org of interest. While not specifically limited to Australian politics, PoliticalCompass assumes that political leanings are more complex than a simple Left or Right inclination. As such, the results of this test provide a more holistic, perhaps truer sense of one's political philosophy. A different take on the 'which way should I lean' theme is the U.S.-based www.DontVote.org which presents photographs of 30 people (ranging from politicians to entertainers) and asks you to name them and their position/profession. Based on your answers you are given a pass or fail mark, indicating whether or not you have enough political knowledge to cast an informed vote (bearing in mind voting in the U.S. is not compulsory).

While it is based on U.S. politics DontVote.org does highlight the important issue of political knowledge. In Australia we have to vote whether we're actively political or not, which means that many people are basing their ballot on just a handful or issues, or maybe even just one. Work Choices is sure to be a hotly contended issue this year, so you'd do well to check out both sides of the argument if you want to claim to have a rounded opinion (or, perhaps, just to know your enemy). The Government 'facts' can be found at www.workchoices.gov.au/ while the Union 'facts' are on display at <http://rightsatwork.com.au/thefacts/>. Curiously both versions of the 'facts' seem to have a glaze on top and a big hole in the middle, which means that no matter who wins the election, we here at the Loop offices might just get our wish after all.