

Blog- Comments on our stand at the Atheist Convention

Written by Rob Rum

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 22:58

Over the weekend we attended the Atheist Convention at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. Given the overall level of awareness about our core issues – internet filter, religion in politics, censorship, sex education, and so forth – I was quite shocked by the number of people who hadn't heard of us. I'd say that only 2 in 10 or so people who stopped to talk were familiar with the Party at all, and at least half of those who had heard of us knew little or nothing aside from the name and that we had run in Higgins and Bradfield.

While there were plenty of sceptics (at an atheist convention – go figure!), there were LOTS of tricky policy questions. I had several old socialists have a go regarding the 'less taxes for small business' platform. I told them it was an attempt to get a better balance, doing more to help the small business owners and employees that constitute the majority of Australian workers while working to ensure that big business is made to step up and pay their fair share in spite of political influence. There were even a few aggressive and borderline hostile responses (mostly on Saturday; by Sunday we had already spoken to most of the die-hards, and most of the traffic was the casual Sunday-only crowd who came mostly for Dawkins). By an overwhelming margin, the people who had a real problem were fixated on the name 'Sex Party', unsurprisingly.



On the flipside, our mere presence spoke volumes, given the highly-unlikely-to-be-repeated-anytime-soon nature of the event, and the near-universal lack of political presence although The Secular Party was there sharing a table with a few other groups. I didn't really notice any dedicated party people manning the table and engaging with attendees. And for every naysayer, bad joke, and squeamish glance, we had multiple positive reactions. I'd say we went through well over 1000 brochures and postcards (not bad for a 2500-capacity event), signed up a few new members on the spot and managed to turn A LOT of initial scoffing and incredulity into interest and enthusiasm as we walked people through who we are and what we stand for. I only wish that we could have had another 2-3 eloquent bodies on hand; as you would have seen from the first photo in the blog you emailed through, the breaks were absolute chaos, and as talkative and engaged as the crowd was, we couldn't possibly engage with everyone who came by to pick up a brochure or ask a question.

In terms of ongoing outreach, I believe Sarah has already passed along the details for the

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woman from Queensland Rationalists who was looking for a speaker, and we had some great chats with the folks from Exit International, who were open to keeping in touch and having an ongoing dialogue with us. I've got a stack of info and literature here from the other exhibiting groups, and will happily pass it along once I've had a chance to look through.

Cheers,

Rob R