Friday night at the Harold Park Hotel has long been a spot where patrons could engage in some fairly serious discussion, seek out the solace of a strong drink or merely reflect with friends on life's more whimsical moments. Until recently however, the mood of each drinker has largely been determined by the success or failure of various horses across the road at the trots. While it's still possible to find punters wondering why favorites always fail in their last stride or less frequently beaming with pride at having picked the long-shot winner of the last, it's more likely these days that the elbows resting on the bar or the voices from the back room will have more to do with politics than punting.

Indeed over the past couple of years most of the "serious" talk at the Harold Park has been inspired by the range of topics and speakers making up the Politics in the Pub series. This autumn the series will focus on: Homes and Homelessness with speakers Chris Sidoti and Peter Botsman on April 28; Child Care - Missing Resources and Growing Need with Eva Cox on May 5; Black Deaths - A Personal View with Bobby Sykes on May 12; and Whither the ABC - Cutting Edge or Just More Pap with Liz Fell on May 19.

Speakers start around 6pm and informal discussion follows: more often than not it flows on around the bar and out into the pub's bistro. The opportunity for a bit of political philosophising and the chance of bumping into a few friends gives Politics in the Pub a cultural mix which is unfortunately all too rare at present. It's a near ideal way of finishing off the working week.

Politics in the Pub: Harold Park Hotel, 115 Wigram Rd, Glebe.

Peter McNelce.

The Friends of the Earth at 222 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, is an important resource in Melbourne. It houses the Organic Fruit and Vegetable Co-op, the Food Co-op (wholefood and soya/dairy products), the FOE Bookshop (environment, peace, women's, lesbian/gay and political books), and a number of environment and peace groups. If you're a lover of organic and whole foods, you can join the two co-ops for around $10 per year per household. If you put some voluntary time into the co-ops, you get extra discounts on your food. The Bookshop is always looking for collective members to take on rosters and participate in its running.

If you're interested in any of the groups housed at FOE, or want more information about the co-ops, ring them on (03) 419 8700 during business hours.

Sherill Berkovitch.

Friday afternoon and Saturday mornings at Acupuncture Colleges (Australia) in Harris St, Ultimo. Don't be put off by the idea of students because this is definitely not cheap and nasty acupuncture. These students are in their fourth and final year of a demanding course, the only acupuncture course issuing a government accredited diploma in Australia. The clinic is also supervised by practitioners recognised by AESO (Acupuncture Ethics and Standards Association). It costs $10 or $5 for pensioners. There is also a Private Practitioner Clinic operating at the college from Monday to Thursday, at which students can observe but treatments are given by accredited practitioners.

The Randle St Wholistic Medical Centre in Surry Hills is also worth keeping in mind. It houses acupuncturists, MD's, counsellors, masseurs, and more, all under the one clinic roof. And if you are a member of HCF, NIB, or any other health fund that covers acupuncture treatments, you can get regular treatments for about $11-$18. The same applies to the Private Practitioner Clinic at the Harris St college. Of course, MD's who also practice acupuncture, can bulk bill if you're unemployed or on a pension.

PS. Nearly all acupuncturists use disposable needles these days: almost certainly on request. The clinic number at Acupuncture Colleges (Australia) is (02) 212 5250; Randle St Wholistic Medical Centre can be reached on (02) 211 3811.

Lyndell Fairleigh.