the front line

As it seems in all spheres of life, the tempo of the Presidential year appears to accelerate as the year draws to a close. A glance in my diary for the past month or so reveals a range of activities, including talks to the Geelong and ACT Branches; the opening of 'Partners in Adult Learning' Conference at Hall's Gap in Victoria's Grampians; the launch of *Guide to Collection Strengths in Australian Special Libraries*; farewell functions to two distinguished colleagues — Vida Horne and Keith Davison both of whom have contributed greatly to the Association over the years; the Lesle Symes Memorial Lecture at the Special and Law Librarians' Conference in Brisbane; and the opening address at the Fourth National Conference of Library Technicians held recently in Melbourne. Each was a rewarding activity in its own right and all valuable opportunities for meeting and mixing with the membership at large.

I should like to spend a few moments talking about the library technician who has become not only an accepted and respected member of the library team, but an essential element in the provision of services in all types of libraries

An indication of the vitality of this group is that almost 400 full and part-time registrants from throughout Australia took part in this biennial conference, including a solid group from far away Darwin. The topics discussed included education, career paths and employ-ment prospects, impact and uses of new technology, the challenge of change, and industrial issues. I was impressed not only by the range of topics covered but also by the stamp of authority and air of commitment of a group which had clearly come of age.

It is almost 18 years since the first Australian Library Technicians' Course was established by Wes Young in Melbourne. The success of that course is now history, and similar courses have since been established in every other Australian state.

Notwithstanding the existence of qualified library technicians in the Australian workforce for well over a decade, I suspect that it is inevitable that there was some continuing debate on the roles of the librarian, and the library technician at this conference.

While, quite properly, any suggestion that the library technician is a second-class citizen was rejected, it seemed that many of the technicians present at the conference regarded themselves as being in a 'vestibule' grade and were planning, or were in the process of enlarging their qualifications with the object of becoming librarians.
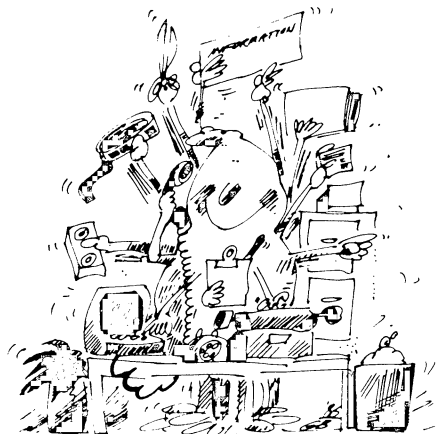
While this is due in part, no doubt, to the desire of some to enhance their ultimate career opportunities, it is also due to the somewhat limited salary ranges for library technicians, particularly when one recognises the increasing number of duties and responsibilities they are being asked to undertake in the day-to-day operation of our libraries.

I am sure that it is the common experience of most librarians that the support and contribution of library technicians is not only valuable but essential. There is a need to further explore the relationship between our professional and paraprofessional spheres of operation, and certainly to ensure that the latter are better rewarded than they are now.

Margaret Munro and her committee are to be congratulated on mounting such a worthwhile conference, and for providing what was obviously a stimulating experience for those able to attend.
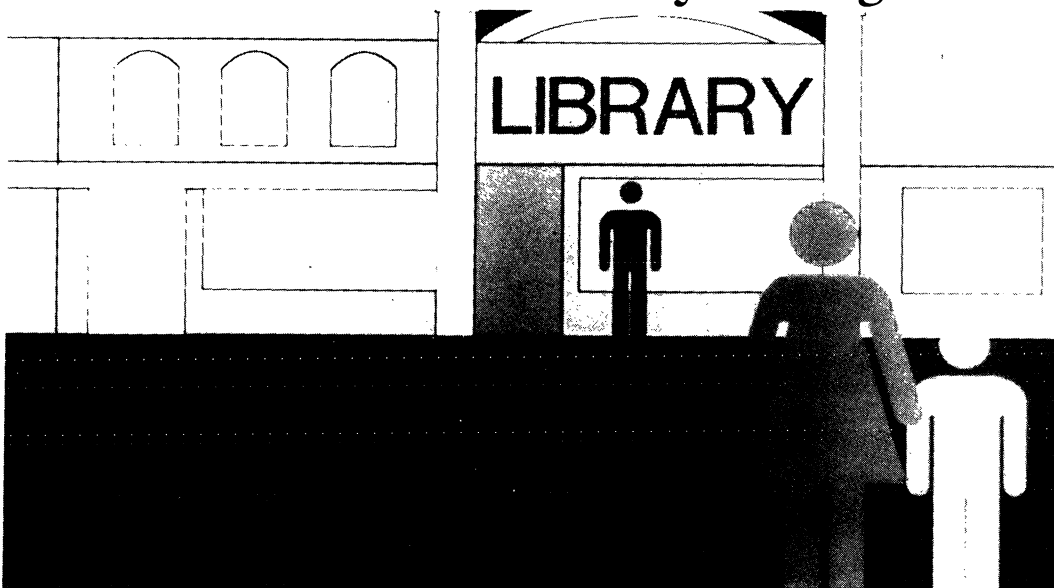
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