

### Help for the Himalayas

During July I visited Ladakh, a state of India high in the Himalayas, and the Ladakh Ecological Development Group. The LEDG is a self-help group formed by educated Ladakhis concerned at the rapid changes overtaking their country since it was opened to the West in 1974. With the advent of tourists came goods from the consumer society, some of which now contribute to air, water and soil pollution.

The LEDG is trying to educate Ladakhis about the dangers of pollution, as well as improving their standard of living through other 'earth friendly' technologies eg solar heating and greenhouses to enable vegetable growing throughout the harsh winter.

The Group is trying to do this with a small library of books and journals (altogether about 400 items) for a population of over one million. It is the only library in the country and tries to make this donated material available to schools and literate adults.

The LEDG would be grateful for any duplicate or old books especially in the following area: alternative medicine, small scale

agriculture and farming, recycling techniques, alternative energies etc. The Group workers can translate these for their fellow Ladakhi's.

If any library, especially in Victoria, has material it can donate I would be pleased to hear from you as I can arrange for a small collection to be sent to Ladakh regularly. Contact: Sibylle R Noras, Chief Librarian, The Age, 250 Spencer Street, Melbourne (03) 600 4211 ext 2280.

Sibylle Noras

### Women's issues

I wish to support Max Borchardt's very rational analysis of attitudes to gender in the selection of librarians for appointment or promotion (*InCite*, 16 October 1987).

As a retired member of an earlier generation of Australian librarians my recollections by no means confirm consistent discrimination to the disadvantage of either gender. Former examples of women in charge of large and important library operations recall such people as E. Archer, C. Campbell-Smith, B. Doubleday, I. Leeson, P. Mander-Jones, E. Sims, E.M. Tattersall and M.E. Wood. Despite phenomenal increases in the size and complexity of large library operations since the Second World War, qualified women are still regarded as eligible to direct such operations, including those of the LAA itself.

In my experience qualified entrants to our profession have been predominantly female and acceptable without regard to gender. Independent of policy or practice elsewhere, I eventually overcame opposition by higher authorities to equal pay for men and women employed in the University of Melbourne

Library. I eventually also overcame strong opposition in the same quarters to recognition by adequate status and salary for the library's three departmental heads. The opposition which I encountered was never supported by any element within our profession.

Axel Lodewycks

### Pompous ratbaggery!

I refer to Max Borchardt's diatribe in *InCite*, 16 October 1987, about Carmen Hannaker's paper on women in librarianship. I do not know what Ms Hannaker's paper says other than what Mr Borchardt reports, but I am not concerned with that. What I am concerned with is the blustering and pompous ratbaggery that Mr Borchardt goes on with, particularly as probably the majority of men in our profession and in society as a whole share the views, totally invalid as they are, espoused by Mr Borchardt.

May I suggest that Mr Borchardt and others like him open their minds to the facts of masculine hegemony and what it has meant and continues to mean for women — second class status, the low paid jobs, servitude even.

The realities of all this can be demonstrated by asking one simple question — why are there not an equal number of women to men in senior positions in just about any area of employment, let alone librarianship? The answer — prejudice and repression — which makes a mockery of Mr Borchardt's observations on 'selection by merit' and 'good people rising to the top'.

Alas Mr Borchardt, the matters Ms Hannaker is dealing with are not side issues within the profession. They are among the most important central issues we face. And

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here is no need for hidden selection criteria - affirmative action criteria can be as public as any other.

The task of righting the wrongs of the past is not easy. Librarianship is usually carried out within the culture of a 'superior' industry, and many of these industries are hide-bound by traditional prejudices. But we can at least start by realising that the sort of approach espoused by Mr Borchardt is quite wrong and will do nothing to address the serious disadvantages faced by our female colleagues.

*Charles Emerton*

## Are most 'good people' male?

Max Borchardt's letter (*InCite* 16 October, 1987) commenting on Carmen Hannaker's paper delivered at the LAA:50 conference requires an answer, if only to refute the illogical nature of what appears to be an emotive response to a central issue in our society and profession. So central is this issue, that legislation has been promulgated to attempt to address the problems underlying the points made in Ms Hannaker's paper.

Nowhere in her paper did Ms Hannaker advocate positive discrimination toward women, and indeed her paper made little direct reference to affirmative action, (a vastly different matter from positive discrimination, in any case) nor to recent Federal legislation. It seems crucial to disentangle these two concepts - positive discrimination and affirmative action - if any meaningful debate is to ensue.

Those 'less capable in the art of reasoning' than Mr Borchardt, are quite able to comprehend the nature and intent of affirmative action programs in Australia. What is meant by affirmative action in the Australian context? A brief quotation from *Affirmative Action: Guidelines for Implementation in Institutions of Higher Education* (Sydney, 1987), should make explicit the underlying assumptions and spirit of Carmen Hannaker's paper, as I understood it.

The Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act 1986, proclaimed on 1 October, 1986, requires certain employers to promote equal opportunity for women in employment by means of affirmative action programs. The intention is to remove discrimination against women in the workplace and to ensure its continued absence... (This)... means that the organisation will aim to eliminate all discrimination against women and ensure that... policies and practices are based on an assessment of each individual's skills, qualifications, abilities and aptitudes, and not on factors such as sex... Institutions of higher education are in the category of employers first required to comply with the legislation.

What the Act intends, and what affirmative action means, is this; in Max Borchardt's own words - 'let's select the right people for the work to be done, rather than impose hidden selection criteria on vacant positions'. Let's encourage 'good people' to 'rise to the top', and if some of those good people need more encouragement because of gender-based factors which disadvantage them, the Act is designed to ensure that they get that encouragement and support from employers, a right and not a privilege.

Most of us, like Carmen Hannaker, refuse to accept the extension of Mr Borchardt's logic, at in the past most of the 'good people' just happened to be male! The somewhat simplis-

tic view of gender relations at work in modern industrial societies propounded in Mr Borchardt's letter is useful as a timely reminder that affirmative action programs within institutions, and within professional bodies, are a vital step in advancing towards equality of employment opportunity for women. This is particularly so in librarianship, a feminised profession, in which the distribution of power has been in inverse proportion to the gender ratio within the profession. In my view this is a central issue, rather than one on the periphery of our concerns. Wastage of any talent, regardless of gender considerations, will surely prove expensive for our profession and for the wider community.

*Cathleen S Pivec*

## Carmen's comments . . .

In the letters section of *InCite* of 16 October, I was interested to read Max Borchardt's interpretation of the paper I gave at the LAA:50th Celebratory Conference.

I would like to stress that the implications which he has drawn are far removed from both the content and the intent of my paper. Nowhere in my paper did I imply, as Mr Borchardt has stated in his letter, that the present position of women in librarianship is a result of the fact that 'they are victims of a male conspiracy and (that) therefore, all men in librarianship are responsible for the oppression of their female colleagues'. The very notion is ludicrous in the extreme. Further, nowhere in my paper did I advocate positive discrimination in favour of women which is what Mr Borchardt appears to believe is synonymous with affirmative action. I assumed that it was unnecessary to point out that there is a marked difference between these two concepts. Like the majority of my colleagues, I too would find it disturbing if women were to be appointed to positions because of their sex and not because of their ability.

I disagree with the point of view expressed that women's issues are a side issue either in our society or in our profession. This comment in many ways encapsulates the whole debate about the position of women in society. As women make up 50 percent of the population and approximately 75 percent of the membership of our profession it is hard to see how gender-based disadvantage or discrimination, whether unconscious or not, can possibly be described as a side issue within the profession.

Mr Borchardt's final comment that we 'should let the good people rise to the top.' implies that to date the good people have been primarily male. This conclusion seems

on the face of it unlikely in the extreme and a 'rational' person would assume that other factors must have contributed. My paper was intended to overcome the misconception that ability is all that matters and that gender is irrelevant to success.

My main thrust was to indicate ways in which the Association might better meet the challenges to librarianship in the future by encouraging greater participation by the many female members of our profession. That these moderate opinions seemed so radical implies how far the equal opportunity education program must progress before gender is no longer a determinant of success.

*Carmen Hannaker*

## The cost of cost recovery

On 27 April 1987 we requested a bulk loan of six fiction books in Armenian language from the National Library for one of our borrowers. The said borrower had already 'read out' the locally available collections in Armenian. The books were received on 21 October 1987 along with a request to pay an amount of \$36 for the interlibrary loan transaction (at a rate of \$6 per book).

In the first place, we wish to object to paying for an interlibrary loan which was placed some months prior to the introduction of interlibrary loans charges by the National Library of Australia.

Secondly, this raises the issue of accessibility by the general public to the collections of the National Library. Due to funding cuts to public libraries by the Victorian State Government, we are unable to provide an interlibrary loans service to our customers in cases where we are charged by other libraries. The only other alternative is to pass the costs on to the user. You would agree that if an Armenian migrant has to pay \$36 for access to six Armenian fiction books held by the National Library, it could hardly be claimed that the collection is 'accessible' to all Australians. This particular case illustrates the grave consequences of the introduction of charges for access to library collections, including interlibrary loans charges.

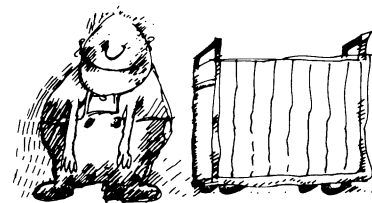
We accept that the National Library, as indeed are local public libraries, is under strong pressure to generate income and to aim at cost-recovery measures. It would be a sad day for all Australians if library managers conceded to such pressures, with the result that only certain persons in the community (ie those who can pay) have access to local and national library collections.

*Tim Bruwer*

City Librarian, Brunswick Public Library

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