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Information Technology (IT) is transforming the workplace of the 90's. In Australia, as in the USA, more than half of all new business expenditure on capital equipment goes on information processing technologies.

In *Pink Collar Blues: Work Gender and Technology*, Belinda Probert and Bruce Wilson (editors), published by Melbourne University Press (ISBN 0 522 84520 7), the implications of the IT Revolution for women workers are discussed by a number of academics, trade unionists and researchers. The conclusions are not comforting. The writers suggest strongly that the IT Revolution is anything but gender neutral and women workers will have to face all the same problems of unrecognised skills and relative worth with which they have struggled for decades.

Most women—and certainly those employed in libraries—continue to be heavily affected by technological change. Yet while this has seen a high proportion of women workers gaining extensive new computing and information-related skills, it is by no means clear that the importance and value of these skills will be reflected in pay or status outcomes. Indeed, several contributors suggest that the process of award restructuring in Australia has failed abjectly to address gender bias and the marginalised employment status of many women.

They fear that the current round of workplace restructuring and enterprise bargaining will only make things worse.

If this is not to be so for library workers, careful thought will need to be given to how best the marginalisation repeatedly identified in *Pink Collar Blues* can be confronted. What type of Enter-

prise Agreement is most likely to help us?

In recent weeks I have enjoyed taking part in several meetings of ALIA groups to discuss the challenges posed by changing industrial relations practices in Australia. One of the issues which often arose has worried me. I find that some librarians believe their best option lies in quickly developing an agreement covering only the library and its staff. It isn't difficult to empathise with librarians in this position, but the approach is fraught with dangers.

No ALIA member will need to be reminded that librarians' salaries have consistently failed to match those of several other employment categories which ostensibly require lesser skill levels and educational qualifications. Regrettably this continues to be the case for many ALIA members, although some improvements have been achieved recently through librarians gaining access to the same classification structures as other professionals.

Difficulties with application of those structures to librarians certainly remain in numerous organisations, but in many others librarians are now accepted as fully fledged professionals.

There is potential for further gains in this area and this is enhanced by changes to Federal industrial law (discussed in February's *Picket Line*) which came into full effect this month.

The introduction into Australian law of the concept of equal pay for work of equal value can in time move the equal pay debate far beyond the limited pursuit of equality only for people doing exactly the same thing at work. Equal pay for equal work has, of course, been at least a step in the right direction. In itself it does nothing

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about bringing occupations in which women predominate onto a level footing with some male dominated categories which are obviously of no greater intrinsic worth. It will be some time before the potential of the new law is realised, but the change is an important one and the scope is considerable.

Will librarians best position themselves now to take full eventual advantage of this if they move away from awards, agreements and classification structures which bind the whole 'enterprise'? Is it going to be easier, from inside or outside an agreement covering all other employees, to argue for the relative worth of their profession? Or to achieve distribution of productivity gains on an across-organisation basis—so that all groups receive the benefit?

Australia's 'new' industrial relations orthodoxy aims for single agreements for individual organisations and envisages common arrangements for all the workers in each enterprise.

Under this approach, the relative worth of different jobs would be determined by *internal* comparison and salary increases justified by increases in *organisational* productivity and efficiency improvement. In this way, relative equity can be achieved for all employees.

Now this won't happen overnight and it would be naive to overlook the many risks for women in enterprise bargaining. It will be even more dangerous, however, for librarians to assume the threats of the emerging system can somehow be avoided by playing the game on an outer court essentially by themselves. If all the prize money will be handed out on the centre court, it would be a good idea to be there. ■