

AT HOME . . .

with Margaret Sydney

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British secretaries **want more to do**

IN Britain, some top private secretaries with high salaries are looking with envy at the lowest paid girls in the office — those in the typing pool.

A London agency did a survey, and came up with the surprising news that a number of Britain's top secretaries would gladly take a salary cut in exchange for a more demanding job.

The same agency did a similar survey five years ago and, after comparing the two, it announced that top secretaries today are given less responsibility than they were in 1969.

I don't know whether the same thing happens here, but it's a funny sort of women's liberation which gives a higher status and higher pay, so that people can slowly go round the bend from sheer boredom.

One English executive secretary gave this account of her day's work. "On average, I do one short letter a day, keep my boss (the chairman of a company) supplied with excellent fresh coffee in the morning, and tea in the afternoon.

"I answer one or two telephone calls, and do a 30-hour week. Girls typing away nonstop in the typing pool from 9.15 a.m. to 5.15 p.m. get paid half my salary."

I can imagine yells from at least some Australian executive secretaries, who might regard the typing pool as a holiday from the sort of day they work.

The English secretary's story makes me

wonder what her boss does to earn a living, if one or two phone calls and one short letter is all he can find to keep his secretary busy.

Another top English secretary, while agreeing that life is pretty dull in most executive-secretary jobs, said, "Any secretary who can't organise her boss into giving her more responsibility is incompetent. Authority is gained, not given."

And that's true, I suppose, up to a point. But women aren't going to be liberated (which is to say they're not going to have really satisfying jobs) until boys and girls coming into a firm are starting off on some sort of equal race for the top.

Every job has its **boring moments**

A BOY starting off in a firm certainly may not make it, but he is usually regarded as being in line for, and even in training for, some sort of executive or managerial job in the long run.

The average girl, on the other hand, can probably never work herself up any higher than being secretary to the boss. If she's under 30 at this time (which this survey says the average exec. sec. is, in London), and if her boss gives her no real responsibility and no executive or liaison power, she's got a long, boring road ahead of her.

But I don't suppose secretaries are alone in this. Other people's jobs always seem more interesting than your own, and every job has large areas of boredom in it.

Cricketers must get bored with playing cricket, farmers must get bored with feeding the pigs, bank tellers must get bored with money, the Queen with opening things, the housewife with washing and ironing, the astronaut with making a thousand checks on a thousand gauges and dials.

I guess people have got bored with what they have to do to earn a living ever since they gave up living in caves and going out hunting when they wanted to eat. And maybe the cavemen got bored with that, which was why they gave it up in favor of a life that led eventually to managing directors and executive secretaries.

If you're bored, comfort yourself with what the German philosopher Nietzsche said: *"Only the finest and most active animals are capable of boredom. A subject for a great poet — God's boredom on the seventh day of creation."*

A bit of hot and cold keeps you alert

ONE of the things that causes boredom in those fine and active animals who inhabit offices is the air conditioning.

Experts from an Architectural Psychology Unit at Sydney University, paralleling the work done by Scandinavian researchers, are convinced that a steady temperature is likely to make office workers feel listless and drowsy.

Most air-conditioned offices, they say, are kept at a temperature of about 23 celsius (74 fahrenheit), and this is about the best temperature for resting the body.

In Scandinavia they are already trying a hot-and-cold temperature cycle system, and the workers find it's like a breath of fresh air blowing through their offices.

The even temperature is said to flatten out the body's rhythms so that people slow down, and begin to feel drowsy, especially if their desks are away from windows, and they can't see out.

The hot-and-cold cycle system changes the temperature by as much as eight degrees celsius, dropping or raising it at the rate of half to one degree a minute.

And that would mean, under the old system, that the temperature could drop from 81 degrees fahrenheit (nice summer day) to 67 degrees (cool summer evening) and back again in less than 20 minutes

day) to 67 degrees (cool summer evening) and back again in less than 20 minutes, which certainly should keep people awake.

It sounds like something that would make a pleasant change for people living in air-conditioned high-rise buildings, too. In a way, they're worse off than office workers, because they spend their nights there as well, missing out on the changes and the sudden, wild southerlies that keep the ordinary suburban dweller in touch with the natural world.