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# British Parliamentary Libraries: History, International Comparisons, and Some Lessons for Tomorrow's Legislature Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

Britain's House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries have a lengthy history beginning with small collections of books and papers in the eighteenth century and evolving into today's large organizations offering a sophisticated range of services. The central theme of this article is the conservatism of these institutions over most of their history, with the creation of modern library facilities only beginning in 1945 for the Commons Library (a process that did not accelerate until some three decades later) and in 1976 for the Lords. By way of comparison I will discuss: the U.S. Library of Congress (founded in 1800); Japan's National Diet Library (created in the postwar reconstruction in 1948); and, to offer an example of a smaller country, Ireland's Oireachtas Library. In summarizing the history of the British parliamentary libraries, I have also tried to indicate some ways in which we might draw upon this historical experience to identify fruitful new future directions for libraries supporting legislatures throughout the world.

## BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES

Most of this article is devoted to the history of the main parliamentary libraries (the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries) of the United Kingdom, but it also contains some comparisons with American, Japanese, and Irish parliamentary facilities.<sup>1</sup> I have focused on what I believe are the salient points for consideration in the context of the aims of this collection of papers, so no attempt is made to explore every aspect of their complex histories or go into great detail.

*Parliamentary democracy* is an often carelessly used expression that actually embraces two different concepts. Thus, ancient Athens had a system

of *direct democracy* where major political issues were decided by assemblies of the entire (male) citizen population, as opposed to being settled by a much smaller number of their representatives meeting as a parliament. A version of direct democratic decision making continues to this day when a referendum is held on a particular issue. In most countries this is limited to rare national votes on constitutional matters or to approve international treaties (the plebiscites in Ireland on the Treaty of Lisbon being notable recent examples of the latter). The only referendum held in the UK as whole—in 1975 on whether to remain a member of the European Economic Community—involved a historic decision to “pool” some of Britain’s sovereignty. However, in Switzerland referenda are a familiar part of the political landscape and the range of issues they address much wider, with them also being held at cantonal and municipal level. Furthermore, many of the individual states of the United States and a number of municipalities conduct referenda on a broader range of proposals such as limits on taxes.

English parliamentary history stretches back to the middle ages, but the legislatures of the late eighteenth century were certainly not democratic institutions. The upper chamber, the House of Lords, was composed overwhelmingly of noblemen who had inherited their seats along with their titles, occasionally reinforced by new members given peerages by the monarch, together with some senior bishops of the Church of England, all of them holding office for life. Members of its counterpart, the House of Commons, were elected by their constituencies and had to face reelection when each Parliament was dissolved. However, only a relatively small proportion of the population enjoyed the right to vote, many of these Members of Parliament (MPs) were effectively chosen by individual aristocrats who controlled their constituencies, while bribery and intimidation of voters often marred contested elections.

Although Parliament had always needed records in documentary form, this material was held as scattered collections of records of parliamentary proceedings, laws, statistical returns, and reports. In 1780, it was suggested that the small collection of papers and books in the charge of the Clerk (senior executive officer) of the House of Commons be held in a single place. A couple of decades passed before a house in Abingdon Street was leased for this purpose. While it now had a home, the largely archival collection of official and semiofficial documents was in poor condition. Charles Abbot (elected Speaker in 1802) laid the basis for a properly organized Commons library when he instructed his staff to collate, bind, and index these parliamentary papers. In 1818 the first Commons Librarian was appointed and Speaker Abbot’s collection moved back to its own room in the Palace of Westminster.<sup>2</sup> The House now developed a “library” in the more generally understood sense of a specific collection of published books along with the official documents, housed in accommodation

specifically set aside for this purpose. The House of Lords followed suit by creating its own library in 1826 (Dobson, 1972).

The Commons Library collection and floor space subsequently increased greatly in size, and it received magnificent new quarters in Charles Barry's Gothic masterpiece (internally decorated by Augustus Pugin) of 1853, after the old Palace of Westminster was largely destroyed by fire in 1834. Yet, apart from the collection being recataloged and subject indexes compiled, its role and character changed little and remained in this state for over a century. In 1850 Sir Robert Harry Inglis, the most assiduous attendant at meetings of the House of Commons Library Committee, proposed a definition of its purpose as "a Library of Business and of Reference; and not a Library of mere Reading; and still less, a Library of Amusement" (quoted in Pond, 2001, p. 25).<sup>3</sup> The MP also tabled a detailed list of subjects that should be covered by the collection. Specific book purchases would be decided by the Speaker, and the committee and the librarian would need the Speaker's consent before even volumes offered as gifts were incorporated into the collection.

However, his motion was successfully opposed by the former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, who argued against a prescriptive acquisitions policy. Two years later the committee authorized the librarian to buy any books he wanted. This was a crucial decision, perhaps the first time a major British library's stock selection had been assigned to its staff rather than made (or at least approved) by those overseeing them. In other hands this might have led to a collection more focused upon parliamentary "business" as opposed to the "amusement" of Members—when it was used at all. Unfortunately, the librarians holding office over the next ninety years displayed a singular lack of vision as to new directions their institutions might take, never mind any innovatory enthusiasm to realize this. Appointments were made to maintain the venerable traditions and atmosphere of the library, not to disturb these with markedly new ideas. This also applied in the House of Lords where librarians stayed in post for very long periods, carrying on into old age, a characteristic that did not prevent a different course being taken, but made it less likely.

Their stewardship has been defended on the grounds that they delivered what their clientele expected and, indeed, I have found only one instance of MPs or Peers demanding change from the librarians in the nineteenth century. Yet in some cases their outlook actually *exacerbated* the problem of a restricted collection largely divorced from the practical realities of governing. In 1875, the Lords librarian had to be instructed to extend the scope of his acquisitions (although merely to major historical publications). Edward Gosse, a most distinguished scholar, augmented the collection as librarian of the House to reflect his *personal* interests in history, literature, and classics (Greenhead, 2009, p. 2). More generally, they made no notable effort to encourage a redefining and widening of members'

expectations. As George Bernard Shaw said: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man." These Librarians were undoubtedly reasonable men (1903, p. 238).

Parliamentarians obviously did use their libraries to find or check facts for use in speeches or their correspondence. Yet these were largely treated in practice as appealing places to work or relax when not attending debates or committee meetings—not primarily as research facilities to support lawmakers in their public duties or enlarge their understanding of issues.

Despite the gradual extension of the franchise and a growing "democratic" influence in British political life, the great majority of legislators remained rich men with aristocratic attitudes. Stock selection echoed that used in the libraries parliamentarians were accustomed to enjoy in gentlemen's clubs and country houses. There was naturally a greater emphasis in the Commons on publications dealing with government, but large parts of the collection were devoted to history and literary classics. This was also true of the Lords library (which also held several hundred volumes on genealogy), aside from a substantial set of legal works to serve the senior judges who sat as "Law Lords."

In 1928 the franchise for electing MPs was finally extended to all men and women aged twenty-one and over. George Benson, one of the new members returned in the elections of the following year, was "appalled," when he first used the Commons Library, "to find the House. . . . served by a library which hardly progressed since 1850 . . . Latin and French classics . . . still in the exact positions . . . they had been originally placed in 1852" (Menhennet, 2000, p. 5).<sup>4</sup> Despite Benson's protests to colleagues and the Speaker, very little reform took place until 1945. It appears the middle and working class MPs who were being elected in steadily growing numbers over the previous fifty years quickly adopted the ethos of the House, with its traditions—even in practical matters like library services—being held in unquestioning respect.

The elections of 1945 resulted in a great influx of new members imbued with a massive discontent with the state of existing institutions and a taste for radical reform. The freshly-elected MPs broadened the social composition of the House at a stroke, and their sheer number hindered assimilation into a complacent "this is how things work in the Commons" outlook. They were far more likely to complain about the Palace of Westminster's antiquated facilities than being awed by its historical atmosphere and architectural grandeur into accepting them. John Vivian Kitto, the librarian, had expressed his frustration the previous year at the lack of resources available to him to provide a service aligned to modern needs (Macleod, 1945).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the forthcoming nationalization of major industries and the creation of a welfare state and National Health Service greatly enlarged the role of government and the scope of Parliament's

responsibilities. A House of Commons Select Committee (1945) enquiry chaired by George Benson recommended far-ranging changes, and after the Second World War, the Commons collections began to be modernized and extended, allowing MPs to do background reading in subjects like economics, industry, social affairs, science, and technology.

A more profound departure was the acceptance that the traditional Library roles of acquiring, cataloging, and storing books and other documents for its parliamentarians needed to be augmented by the provision of an information service. Initially modest in scale, with just two researchers and two statisticians in 1946 dealing with queries from MPs seeking specific information or background material, the research facility was to grow substantially. The increase in the volume of its work (leading to a staff of twenty-four by 1990) was stimulated by factors such as

- a far greater propensity for constituents to write to their MPs;
- much intensified lobbying activity by interest groups and, at a later stage, professional lobbyists;
- the great expansion in the number of Parliamentary Questions (PQs) tabled to ministers by members, rising from about 5,000 in 1900 to over 30,000 in the mid-1970s (Clerks in the [House of Commons] Table Office, 1979);<sup>6</sup>
- provision from 1971 of an allowance for MPs to hire research assistants. From this point, the information needs of members have been increasingly mediated through their research assistants and other aides, rather than made directly. Nonetheless, the ability to respond to these in a personalised way remains a vital ingredient in successful parliamentary librarianship. This “bespoke” form of service provision has been a key factor in current MPs giving their library the highest rating of all the House services available to them.

Besides answering specific enquires, the information unit began producing research briefings on matters of general political, economic, social, or international relations interest.

Coping with steadily mounting demand for the library’s services led—eventually—to expanded staff numbers. In 1878, the librarian was supported by merely an assistant and two messengers and even by 1954, the total complement was fewer than thirty employees. Nor did they have much technological support: until 1954 there was just one telephone (located in a broom cupboard) to serve the whole library. Significant growth in personnel only took place in the final quarter of the twentieth century. By 1976 there were about 75 in post, rising sharply to 173 in 1990, and reaching 200 by the millennium.<sup>7</sup> In 1991, an important change in the character of the library took place when most of its staff moved out of their cramped Palace of Westminster accommodation to modern premises in nearby Whitehall.

The library's role of providing impartial information and research support to MPs grew more important as the range and complexity of parliamentary business grew. Another factor fuelling its growth was the imbalance between the information resources available to members serving in government and the rest of the House. Ministers were now advised and supported by a large number of civil servants offering in-house expertise and advice, while ministry libraries evolved from a fairly modest scale before the Second World War into major assets equipped to meet governmental information needs. In 1950 the predecessor of the Department of Trade and Industry Library had 40 staff (none of them professional librarians); by 1976 this had been increased to 147, including 46 librarians (Pearson, 1976).<sup>8</sup> So a single ministry library, albeit one of the largest, had a far larger staff complement than the 75 serving the whole House of Commons. Opposition MPs and government party backbenchers were thus placed at a serious disadvantage in terms of being able to fulfill their duties to hold the government to account, generate and promote alternative policies, and advance the particular interests of their constituents. Accelerated growth in the staffing of the House Library from 1976 was partially a result of the realization that augmenting its resources would be a valuable counterweight to the far superior information provision enjoyed by the Executive.

Another factor was a major shift in the underlying political balance within the Commons. From 1974 until 1979, the government lacked an assured majority for its legislative proposals and the almost complete dominance of the House by the Conservatives and Labour parties in the postwar years was broken (to some extent). After decades of being marginalized, the Liberal party regained a larger numerical representation and greater political weight, while the arrival of Scottish and Welsh nationalist members and the rupture of the traditional alliance between the Ulster Unionists and the Conservatives produced a more politically diverse chamber. The closeness of votes in the Commons in these years both enhanced the influence of individual MPs and added to the need for factual support for use in debates and wider political campaigning. This in turn stimulated the demand for the library's services.

The transition from a largely aristocratic political system to a democratic one drastically weakened the power of the Lords. Their right to veto legislative proposals approved by the Commons was removed in 1911, and the length of time the Peers could hold these up cut to one year in 1949. Compared to the period before the First World War, Peers underwent a considerable reduction in political importance and influence. While MPs received salaries, members of the Upper House were (apart from the Law Lords and those serving in government) part time and unpaid. Many Peers rarely bothered to attend the House, and its business was carried on by a much smaller number of "working" Peers. This very different

institutional context meant that their library consequently escaped, for over twenty more years, the kinds of pressure for change that transformed its Commons counterpart into an up-to-date reactive and proactive information resource. Its work was focused more upon meeting the requirements of the Law Lords than the chamber's roles in lawmaking, scrutinizing government, and debating public issues (Greenhead, 2009, p 3).

The composition of the House began to alter once Life Peers (whose right to sit in the Lords was not inherited by their sons) were introduced in 1958. This new type of Peer tended to participate more in its affairs and placed a larger number of—and more challenging demands—upon the library. By 1976 (around when, as noted above, the pace of expansion and innovation in the Commons Library quickened) the existing library provision was accepted to be inadequate to cope with Peers' requirements. A Working Group of Peers was set up to see how it might be improved (House of Lords Working Group, 1977). The most radical option, merging the two libraries, was rejected. Instead the Working Group's 1977 report advocated steps toward updating the existing institution such as buying publications that related to current issues and circumstances, establishing a research service, employing professionally-qualified librarians, and beginning to introduce computer technology.

Acceptance and implementation of these recommendations laid the foundations for modernizing the Lords Library, although its resources remained far more modest than those available to the Commons: in 1990, it still only had two researchers. During the 1990s, the pace of change accelerated and the scope of its activities was broadened. From just ten staff in 1976, the complement grew to over thirty by 2009 (with three additional researcher posts being created from 1997).

The bulk of hereditary Peers lost their right to attend the House in 1999. Although this was a signal constitutional reform, it had relatively little effect on the library's work, most of which was generated by the working Peers. In 2009 another major break with tradition took place when the Law Lords were replaced by a Supreme Court and their collection removed from the House. The Lords Library continued to maintain a strong legal collection, nonetheless, because (to avoid wasteful duplication with the Commons Library) it provided materials in the field of law for MPs as well as Peers.

## U.S. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The U.S. Congress is generally regarded as beginning with the Second Continental Congress convened in 1775, and the following year this body issued the Declaration of Independence from Britain. Although the Congress of the United States drew some of its features from the Westminster model, there are striking differences. Thus the Senate, the upper house of Congress, reflects America's federal character with each state, regardless

of its population, being represented by two senators. The lower chamber (the House of Representatives) was, as with most democratic assemblies, elected according to the population of each congressional district. Both senators and congressmen served for fixed terms.

When the legislature moved from Philadelphia to the new federal capital of Washington, DC, in 1800, a single library was established for the use of its members (unlike the separate facilities maintained some years later for the two Houses of Parliament in London).<sup>9</sup> The principal influence on its early development was President Thomas Jefferson who believed that there was “no subject to which a member of Congress may not have occasion to refer.” Hence the collection embraced a far wider range of material than the core topics such as law and government that a parliamentary library might be expected to contain. When it perished in the destruction of the Capitol Building by the British in 1814, Jefferson sold his substantial personal collection to Congress to start rebuilding the library.

This task was undertaken by George Watterston, the first full-time librarian of Congress. While the British parliamentary libraries remained exclusively for the use of legislators, Watterston allowed the public access to his collection. This “concession” became firmly-established doctrine under Ainsworth Rand Spofford (librarian 1864–97). He argued that, while continuing to serve Congress, the library’s facilities should be available to all Americans. Acceptance of this principle by the elected members enabled the Library of Congress to evolve into the national library of the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Spofford reaffirmed Jefferson’s original universalist vision of it as a repository of international and not just American publications, reversing a tendency to ignore foreign works (apart from those published by the governments of other countries). This was a momentous policy decision: the national library would not restrict its acquisitions to the “national” literature, but collect publications from across the world for the benefit of Americans. Having also accomplished the centralization of U.S. copyright deposit with the library, Spofford’s term of office was crowned by the erection of a new structure in the Capitol complex dedicated to its collections. When opened in 1897, the Jefferson Building was the world’s largest library.

Spofford’s successors continued to extend the scope of the library’s collections and the range of the constituencies it served. Herbert Putnam, librarian from 1899, defined its mandate as “a duty to the country as whole” and projected its reach beyond the facilities available in Washington. The Library of Congress classification scheme was adopted by many American (and some foreign) libraries, bibliographic information was standardized and distributed on printed cards for easy filing, and interlibrary loan schemes were supported by union catalogs it developed.

With the creation of the Legislative Reference Service in 1914, the Library of Congress began to provide additional support to members of the Senate

and House by offering them personally-tailored research services. This innovation, inspired by the services offered by the New York Public Library and the state legislature of Wisconsin, was later renamed the Congressional Research Service. In the 1960s, the Library of Congress became an early adopter of computer technology by creating its MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) protocol for communication bibliographic data in electronic form, which gained the status of an international standard by 1973.

Recognition of the fundamental significance and scale of the "information explosion" has in recent years secured greatly increased government funding for the library. However, like national libraries elsewhere, enhanced budgets and staffing levels were struggling to keep pace with the vast surge in publication, although new buildings were added in 1939 and 1980. Since then developments in technology have offered hope that the relentless physical pressure for more accommodation and access can be contained.

### JAPAN: THE NATIONAL DIET LIBRARY

The Imperial Diet was set up in 1890 as part of the modernization of Japanese society in face of the threat posed by aggressive and more technologically advanced Western powers.<sup>11</sup> Creating a representative assembly was seen as an essential part of this process, and Japan sent a delegation to examine various European models. However, the government was determined to retain actual political control behind the façade of parliamentary institutions. Hence Japan's parliament was largely inspired by late nineteenth century German and Austro-Hungarian constitutional practice (even its English name, the Diet, came from the Teutonic term) where the legislature could be ignored in effect by a dominant executive. The Diet, made up of an elected lower house and a largely hereditary House of Peers, indeed proved ineffectual in curbing the power of the entrenched and increasingly militaristic oligarchy. Although libraries were provided for each chamber, the prevailing political culture in which their members had little influence or even interest in policy issues meant that they failed to develop into tools contributing to democratic development.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the American occupation administration placed great emphasis on securing genuinely parliamentary government. Hence the new constitution drawn up by it in 1947 replaced the Imperial Diet with a National Diet and substituted an appointed House of Councilors for the House of Peers. At the same time the Library of Congress had begun to undertake international service in addition to discharging its national duties. It created a reference collection for the first meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco and in 1947 sent a team led by Werner W. Clapp to help set up the new National Diet Library. The Americans were familiar with the idea of combining the parliamentary library with the national one, so it is not surprising that this example was followed in

Japan. Thus the Imperial Library established in 1898 (and effectively the national library) was integrated with those of the two chambers of the Diet (Welch, 1994).<sup>12</sup>

### IRELAND: THE OIREACHTAS LIBRARY

When the Irish Free State was established in 1922, it had a bi-cameral parliament. This was maintained with the promulgation of a new constitution in 1937. Compared with the other examples mentioned earlier, Ireland has far less people and thus a smaller-scale legislature, so a single library service serves both the Dail (lower house) and Seanad (upper house). Dublin Alderman Thomas Kelly, a prominent writer and bibliophile, was invited by William Cosgrove, the head of government, to begin assembling its collection (Carden, 2004).<sup>13</sup>

Being located in Leinster House, the parliament building, its attractive Palladian style reading room was convenient for members of both houses, while the National Library of Ireland was nearby for the supply of additional material. This physical proximity to elected representatives is an important advantage. Charles Barry, architect of the New Palace of Westminster built after the 1834 fire, sited the Commons and Lords Libraries close to their respective chambers, offering parliamentarians visiting them a coveted view over the river Thames and designing inviting rooms in them for their use.

The staffing of the Oireachtas Library was modest, consisting until the 1970s of the librarian, a graduate assistant, three clerks, and two messengers. In 1976 a research service was introduced to extend the traditional range of services, and a couple of years later the library was being described by Ian Mowat as "an interesting example of the provision that can be made with a small staff and limited budget" (Mowat, 1978, p 41).<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the staff, financial constraints hindered its development. The research service collapsed, mainly due to lack of resources, and in 1993 an internal review declared it had been "starved of resources over a long period . . . compares extremely unfavourably with the facilities on offer in all EU parliaments [and] falls seriously short of providing the minimum service which Members of the Oireachtas have a right to expect."<sup>15</sup>

No fundamental steps were taken to address this situation until late in 2005 (when the staff still numbered a mere twelve). Extraordinarily, although it had over eighty years of experience as an institution, the Oireachtas Library had to draw upon the example (among others) of the very recently created Scottish Parliament in framing its plans for modernization. These included: upgrading the stock (particularly in the fields of economics, law, social sciences, and political science); integrating the library, research and information functions; and offering expanded research products. The staffing complement was raised from twelve to over thirty.<sup>16</sup> It will be interesting to see if this level of provision, set in the

boom—"Celtic Tiger"—days for Ireland's economy, can be maintained when the December 2009 budget announced very severe cuts in Irish public sector expenditure, with more pain for it in the years ahead (Department of Finance, 2009).<sup>17</sup>

## POSSIBLE LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

### *Vision*

Vision is the basis for any radical change. Imagination is a necessary (although obviously not a sufficient) condition for major advances. Jefferson envisaged an American library extending over all subjects—other parliamentary libraries restricted the scope of their collections until after the Second World War. Librarians of Congress like Spofford and Putnam looked beyond present circumstances toward new horizons—for example, turning it into a national library, collecting world as well as U.S. material, or trying to help libraries throughout the United States.

### *Institutional Background*

The institutional background is crucial. British parliamentary libraries suffered from the "legacy of history" mainly because those they served were content with a limited service. In the Commons the "acquisitions policy . . . was ill-defined; its non-revision and extension into the twentieth century resulted in 1939 in an antique collection, generally ill-suited to the needs of the institution it served" (Pond, 2001, p. 12).<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America's parliamentary library showed a marked capacity for not only adopting change, but also instigating it. Apart from the U.S. example of ways of delivering enhanced library services, there were some inspiring British ones such as the towering achievements of Antonio Panizzi at the British Museum and the growing sophistication, also seen in America, of librarianship in the academic and public library fields. Despite a wealth of good practice to emulate, Westminster's two libraries, even as late as in the two decades following the First World War (and longer, in the case of the Lords), remained beautiful settings<sup>19</sup> for collections, many of whose items would have been more appropriately placed in an antiquarian or academic setting.

Likewise, the Japanese Diet libraries did not start to develop properly until the shock of postwar occupation and reconstruction led to new thinking about their role.

### *Institutional Limitations*

While recognizing the institutional limitations on their power of individual initiative, the outlook and personal qualities of the parliamentary librarian is of great importance.

In my work as a business consultant, I often discover that clients lack a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve in a project, sometimes mis-

specify the goal sought and are frequently unaware of sources of potential opportunity they might seize. So I do not see my role as just *doing what they initially ask*, but also helping them identify what is needed and sharpen its clarity, together with alerting them to ways of capturing additional gains. Likewise, if parliamentary librarians merely restrict themselves to doing their existing jobs well and making small incremental improvements, they may be neglecting to bring larger, more beneficial ways of innovating to the attention of their elected members and guide them into agreeing to embark in fruitful new directions.

Having a powerful independent librarian provides a more favorable environment for innovation. Historically, in Britain each House of parliament has appointed its own library chief, while in the United States the president has chosen the librarian of Congress (although Senate approval of the nomination was needed from 1897). The president sometimes selected prestigious nonlibrarians like poet Archibald MacLeish or scholar Daniel Boorstein, in the face of considerable opposition, who had the national status to advance their vision, rather than seeing themselves as merely servants to do the bidding of Congress.

#### *Democratic Legitimacy*

The beginning of this paper emphasized that parliamentary institutions are not necessarily democratic. I believe the most powerful challenge facing contemporary parliaments is to maintain their democratic legitimacy in the face of many negative trends. These include disregard by the executive arm of governments, falling voter participation, mass disillusion with politicians, and the competition of bloggers and similar social networks to their status as the “debating chamber of the nation.”

#### *Connect with Public*

Here there is scope for parliamentary libraries to help *reconnect* the public with both political life and the parliamentarians elected to serve them. Again, this will call for vision, a willingness to explore new possibilities, and persistent, clearly-directed leadership.

*Outreach* is now seen as essential if parliamentary institutions are to remain at the center of public affairs. This requires a major, enthusiastic commitment to explaining the workings of their chambers and members and facilitating the citizens they *ultimately* serve in exercising their democratic rights. In this cause, some excellent support has been lent by the libraries of the two British Houses of Parliament.<sup>20</sup> The library of the Polish Sejm has also done fine work in making its archives and other resources accessible to the public.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Future*

Parliamentary libraries have a long and fascinating history as institutions at the heart of the political life of their countries. They are well placed to

make even greater contributions in the future to helping ensure that *parliamentary* government means *democratic* government, with two provisos: that they have the foresight to identify these contributions; and that they are allowed to realize them.

## NOTES

1. In all these respects it is a considerable extension of Murphy (2006).
2. Wilding (1948) states that until 1818 the library “was merely a collection of journals and official documents” (p. 68).
3. Pond (2001) reproduces the minutes, originally in manuscript form, of the Standing Committee on the Library of the House. He concludes that its decisions in 1850 to reject Inglis’ motion (pp. 24–25) and in 1852 to allow the librarian unfettered control over acquisitions (p. 27) “shaped the Library’s development for the next ninety or so years” (p. 11). Pond, a long-serving senior member of the House of Commons Library staff, also strongly implies that the path taken was the *wrong* one.
4. Menhennet (2000), besides quoting Benson’s outraged comments, also notes that the library’s failings had been criticized as early as 1923 by the eminent historian and MP Sir Charles Oman (p. 47).
5. Kitto presented the Speaker with a memorandum stating the library was out of date, understaffed, lacked a serviceable catalog, its stock “all over the place” and the book fund for new purchases inadequate.
6. Although parliamentary questions can merely ask for opinions or indirectly challenge views held by ministers, most involve a factual element. MPs tabling a growing number of PQs thus increased their demands upon the research service and the library’s facilities in general. A greater need for factual support was also fuelled by the larger postbags received by members and their encounters with those lobbying them on specific issues.
7. I am conscious that measuring library scale by number of employees is somewhat crude in that it does not take into account factors like the mix of staff, changes in definition of department, and so on. Yet it serves as a reasonably adequate proxy for more complex and perhaps not more satisfactory measures.
8. This was originally the Board of Trade Library. The new name was adopted when the board (discharging much the same role as a Department of Commerce in other countries) was merged with the Ministry of Technology in 1970.
9. For succinct histories of the Library of Congress, see Cole (1994) and Cole (n.d.).
10. It should be noted that the Smithsonian Institution was a strong candidate for this role in the 1850s.
11. For information on the Japanese legislature and its history, see National Diet [Japan], at <http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/index.html>.
12. In 1872 the Ministry of Education founded a public library, the Shojakukan, in Tokyo. Its collection was incorporated into the Imperial Library, Teikoku Toshokan, set up in 1898.
13. The “sparse” records available do not enable a precise date to be given for the formation of the library, but it was “in or about 1922” (Carden, 2004, p. 1).
14. Ian Mowat was a senior member of the National Library of Scotland’s staff.
15. Correspondence from senior management, Oireachtas Library (December 2009).
16. *Irish Library News* (2006, p. 6).
17. The public sector deficit, currently some 12 percent of annual gross domestic product, has to be cut to under 3 percent by 2014 to return to meeting European Union fiscal rules. Financial Statement of the [Irish] Minister of Finance . . . December 9, 2009: <http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2010/FinancialStatement.aspx#item10> (viewed December 15, 2009). This means ongoing curbs on public spending.
18. Pond (2001) also believes that if Sir Charles Oman had seen the early Library Committee Minutes: “he would no doubt have laid the blame for the development of the Library in the 1850–1920 period as a ‘glorified country house library’ squarely at the door” of the Committee’s members in their two crucial meetings in 1850 and 1852 (p. 11).
19. Pond (2001, p. 12) writes “that perhaps the most interesting thing . . . is how profligate the Library Committee were with public money. . . . The ambience of the result they achieved was superb, but at what price?”

20. The bicameral Outreach service “seeks to promote awareness of the work, processes and relevance of the institution of Parliament, and through doing so, to increase levels of engagement”: (*Parliamentary Outreach Annual Review 2009*, p. 2).
21. The Biblioteka Sejmowa (Poland) website states that: “Collections and services of the Library are also available to external users, especially to employees of government offices and national institutions, and also to academics and other people interested in parliamentary matters” ([http://bib.sejm.gov.pl/witryna/index\\_eng.html](http://bib.sejm.gov.pl/witryna/index_eng.html)).

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