

Historical Overview: The Parliamentary Library from Past to Present

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In 2002 Quebec's National Assembly hosted an international conference on the history of parliamentary libraries. On that occasion, Gaston Bernier called for more research on the history of parliamentary libraries, inviting researchers to make use of the rich and unexplored archives of parliamentary libraries throughout the world (2003). This historical overview features some of the most prominent parliamentary libraries in the world, their evolution, and the collections and services the institutions provide to their constituencies.

Parliaments are assemblies of elected representatives, usually of an entire nation, that have supreme legislative powers within a particular state or country. The distinctive qualities of different types of parliaments may be explained by the varying historical contexts in which countries have established their parliaments. Systems of parliamentary government vary according to the constitutional role assigned to the parliament and the electoral and party systems that determine their composition and political organization (McLean, 1996). Parliaments are an expression of democratic values. Democratic parliaments should be representative, transparent, accessible, and effective. In order to fulfill these characteristics, parliamentarians need access to up-to-the-minute unbiased research and information facilities. A well-resourced parliament, such as is typical in developed economies, will have, *inter alia*, a comprehensive library and information service (Beetham, 2006).

Parliamentary libraries (also known under various terminologies such as federal libraries, legislative libraries, information resource centers, documentation centers, or reference services) enhance the research and information capacity of parliaments. As their histories show, however, some also came to consider their constituencies as lying beyond the confines of their parent legislature.

Most parliamentary libraries are relatively modest in scale. The median number of staff is approximately 15 for libraries in Western Europe, 10 for Latin America, and 4 or 5 staff for the rest of the world. A few parliamentary libraries are quite large: the U.S. Congressional Research Service (part of the Library of Congress) has a staff of almost 900, including over 370 specialized researchers. Library staffs of 200 or more are found in Australia, Canada, India, South Korea, and the UK House of Commons (Robinson, 2003).

Older parliamentary libraries have been able to amass extensive collections, while those that have appeared relatively recently are much less well endowed. In 2004, Roumeen Islam noted that the distribution of parliamentary libraries and their resources varied greatly, from the U.S. Library of Congress, which has 110 million books and 75,000 periodical subscriptions, to Burundi, whose parliamentary library has only 50 books, and to Paraguay, whose library subscribes to only 1 periodical. Not surprisingly, the distribution of research staff is equally skewed—meaning that deficiencies in parliamentary library collections are typically not offset by other sources of information (Islam, 2004). General information on parliamentary library resources and staffing worldwide is available at the Database of the World Directory of National Parliamentary Libraries hosted by the German Parliament (German Bundestag), although certain entries need to be updated. Today, nearly all legislatures have parliamentary libraries to assist them in obtaining and using information in their deliberations (Robinson, 2003), although this was not always the case.

EUROPE

France

One of the outcomes of the French Revolution was the establishment of the National Assembly. In 1792 the National Assembly decided to begin purchasing reference books, and the following year they appointed the first librarian. In 1794 the Committee on Public Instruction decided to constitute a collection consisting of “the best works” to support the activity of the different committees of the National Convention. In 1796 a law stipulated the establishment of a library that was to serve both chambers of the legislation. Between 1796 and 1828, the library was entitled to receive legal deposit copies that contributed to the growth of its collections (Assemblée Nationale, n.d.). Today the collections amount to 700,000 books and 3,000 periodicals, and its staff consists of 21 librarians. The library is open to the deputies. Only its historical collections are available for scholarly research. Valuable items from the rare book and manuscript collection constitute objects of temporary exhibits and displays.

The Senate is the other chamber of the French Parliament. Ever since its establishment in 1795, the French Senate has had its own library.

Originally, its collections consisted primarily of parliamentary debates and books on law and economics. Today the holdings amount to 450,000 books and 2,100 periodicals. The library's mission is to assist with preparation of materials that are relevant to legislative work. The library employs a staff of 23 librarians. The library also acts as the Senate's archives. Its collections are open to the members of the Senate (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008).

The French experience offers a good example of the evolution of a parliamentary library research service. Having recognized the importance of information for the efficient functioning of the parliament is the reason why, in 1963, the French National Assembly created a parliamentary and administrative information division (within the parliamentary library) for the purpose of collecting and synthesizing administrative and governmental information relating to particular questions. This was only the beginning of an effort that was not completed until 1970, when the Office of Research and Documentation was created (Campbell & Laporte, 1981). Very similar developments occurred in Germany, Britain, and Canada (Miller, Pelizzo, and Stapenhurst, 2004).

Great Britain

The British Parliament is one of the oldest in the world, with a history of over 700 years. The bicameral modern British Parliament is one of the oldest continuous representative assemblies in the world (Birth of the English Parliament). The House of Commons Library was started in 1818. A purpose-built library opened in 1828, and following a fire in 1834, which destroyed the old Palace of Westminster, the present suite of library rooms was opened in 1852. In the first part of the twentieth century, the library was a traditional club library with a large collection of parliamentary material and general books, but with very few staff. In 1945/46 a Select Committee recommended a great increase in purchase grant, that the library should be recataloged, and that research staff should be hired to give specialist assistance to members. In 1991 most of the staff moved to the newly renovated building near the Palace of Westminster while the original rooms, the Members' library, remained and housed the department's main reference service points for MPs (Menhennet, 2000). An entire volume featuring the history of the library came out in its second edition in 2000. The library as well as the Parliamentary Archives are part of the Department of Information Services, which also has the responsibility for the House's public information services (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008).

The House of Commons Library also has a service point, the e-Library, in the new House of Commons building opened in 2001. The library has a total staff of 180 who provide specialist and impartial research, analysis, and information and briefing services for MPs and their staff and committees. The research service is grouped into eight sections, each of which

holds specialized collections of material: business and transport, economic policy and statistics, home affairs, international affairs and defense, parliament and constitution, science and environment, social and general statistics, and social policies. Currently the library harbors a collection of 700 periodicals; 250,000 bound volumes of parliamentary material, books, and pamphlets; and considerable amounts of unbound materials such as newspapers and periodicals, with 90,000 being available for loan. Users can also access a digital collection consisting of some 1,000 e-journals (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008).

The House of Lords Library came into existence in 1826, when books owned by the offices of the House were placed in the library. Throughout the years, the focus remained firmly on the collection of legal and parliamentary materials. Early in 1834, as space was becoming scarce, the French Chamber of Peers offered the library around 1,800 books including parliamentary works, memoirs, and histories, in exchange for publications of the British Parliament. The various librarians that managed the holdings added their own spin to collection development. In the early 1900s a Library Committee was established to discuss with Members the management of the library and to suggest future improvements that could be made to it. The committee still exists today, although it is now known as the Information Committee and has a much wider remit than just the library, overseeing the use of information across the House (Jones, 1998). The current staff of over thirty are responsible for providing accurate, objective, and timely research and reference services to members in support of the legislative, deliberative, and judicial functions of the House. Such services may include compiling information packages, database searches, press cuttings, the production of references, and the publication of the *Lords Library Notes*, summarizing developments and listing references in respect of topics of particular relevance to the House (*House of Lords Library*, n.d.). The library works closely with the House of Commons Library in the development and delivery of specialized information to all users of the United Kingdom Parliamentary Intranet (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008). A new branch of the library was launched in 2008, with a new e-library branch scheduled to open in 2011.

Sweden

Parliamentary libraries in the Northern European countries, although initially created to serve only the members of the parliament and their staff, have been practicing an open style of services by including the general public in the clients they serve. The Swedish Riksdag Library was established in 1851. At the end of the nineteenth century, the library extended its services to other government agencies, including ministries. In 1918 it opened its doors to scholars and graduate students. The Information

Center of the Swedish Riksdag, which was created in 1995 as a separate entity to communicate with the general public on issues related to the Riksdag, receives 100,000 visitors per year (Brundin, 2005).

Denmark

The Library, Archives and Information Service of the Folketing (the Danish Parliament) was established in 1850. The library was an independent entity under the Bureau of the Folketing until 1990, and from 1990 to 1998, part of the Information and Documentation Department. In July 1998 the library became an independent department headed by the parliamentary librarian with direct reference to the secretary general of the Folketing. In 2000, its collections amounted to 238,900 volumes and 2,430 periodical titles, and it was staffed by 16 librarians. According to the statutes, the library is an internal research library for jurisprudence, economics, politics, and history, assigned with the task of serving Parliament and its officials (*Parliamentary Libraries of the Nordic Countries*, 2000).

Norway

Stortingsbiblioteket (The Library of the Norwegian Parliament) was founded in 1871. Acquiring books for the use of the Parliament started in 1818, four years after the establishment of the Norwegian Parliament. The collection was gradually extended, focusing on literature in the fields of political science, law, and economics. The library is primarily a library for the members of the Parliament and staff but may also be used by former members, the government, and their ministries (*Parliamentary Libraries of the Nordic Countries*, 2000).

Finland

The Parliament Library in Finland is the youngest of the Nordic countries parliamentary libraries. Since its foundation in 1872, it has cooperated with other libraries in the country and has operated as a public institution. The library is open to all, and it is heavily involved with information provision online (Johansson, 2002; Laaksovirta, 2002).

Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Former Soviet Union Republic

Parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia and the former Soviet Union republics reshaped their libraries after the demise of Communism. The parliamentary libraries of the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) are helping to rebuild democratic institutions in the region after fifty years of Soviet rule. Currently the national library of each republic provides information services to its parliament. The three national libraries signed a cooperation agreement in 1992 to help meet challenges, such as the lack of books and computer technology (Eenmaa, 1997).

Beginning in April 1991, an initiative arose from the U.S. Congress, the Special Task Force on the Development of Parliamentary Institutions in Eastern Europe (Gifford, 1993). The goals of the task force were to reduce

the information deficits faced by the newly constituted democratic legislatures of the region, to assist the parliaments in Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States in four major areas: the development of library and research services, the development of a comprehensive automation program, the establishment of research capabilities, and the development of training for parliamentary librarians and legislative staff (Ronai & Bryant, 1992).

The Library of the German Bundestag began its activity in 1949 with a collection of 1,000 volumes taken over from the Parliamentary Council. Today, with over 1.3 million volumes, it serves primarily the German Parliament (German Bundestag, *Functions*, n.d.). Marga Coing (2001) states that until 1990, the four sections of the library used to work in isolation but a new institutional communication model was implemented from 1990 to 1995. The internal participatory management led to better cooperation with the external agencies the library serves.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought about the demise of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The 1990s witnessed the dismemberment of Socialist Yugoslavia, the split of Czechoslovakia, and the breakaway of the Baltic States and of several other Soviet republics from the USSR. The decade thus represented a period of nation building. The countries of the region have been in transition from totalitarian regimes to emerging democracies where parliamentary life has been acquiring new dimensions based on practices unknown during the Cold War. Robinson and Gastelum (1998) state the following:

The period that began with the peaceful destruction of the Berlin Wall and culminated in the unraveling of the former Soviet Empire has been viewed as “the age of parliaments,” with legislatures becoming more assertive and playing a more active role in setting policies that govern their nations. The key to democracy is an effective legislature. By the same token, the key to an effective legislature is the knowledge and information that permit it to make informed decisions on specific issues and to play an active role in the policy-making process of the nation.

In August 1991 the IFLA Congress took place in Moscow, and parliamentary librarians were discussing issues pertaining to the role of parliamentary libraries within the new post-1990 sociopolitical context. The papers constituted a volume edited by Ernst Kohl (1991) and suggestively titled *Soviet and East European Parliamentary Libraries at the Dawn of the Post-Communist Era*. While the IFLA Congress was under way, the Soviet putsch took place. The event marked the beginning of the destabilization of the Soviet Union and, ultimately, led to its collapse. Andreeva and Kirkwood (2000) capture the political atmosphere of the time and the Soviet librarians' involvement in the social events:

And librarians, who had printed underground newspapers even while hosting IFLA in Moscow during the revolution of 1991, realized that

they now had a continuing political mission: to build democracy and recreate civil society through the delivery of information that would create an informed, critical, participative citizenry. . . . It was in this historical context that the idea arose of restoring the Russian Parliamentary Library, which had first come into being in 1906 and had continued to serve the Duma of the Russian Empire and of its successor republics until 1918. In 1991 the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation decided that they needed a library to aid them in their work, and passed a law to that effect.

In 1994, a year after the Russian Constitution was endorsed, the new Parliament (the State Duma and the Federation Council) enacted a federal law on the status of legal deposit copies of official documents. For the first time in the history of Russian librarianship, libraries and legal repositories were legally encouraged to build collections of official documents for public access. Today, Russian librarians continue their efforts to provide free public access to legal information through a nationwide network of public legal information centers and to support public authorities in obtaining the information they need to conduct their daily business. Andreeva and Kirkwood (2000) mention that in the Russian Parliamentary Library, "one can find literally all Russian federal official publications."

The European Union

The European Parliament is considered to be one of the most powerful legislatures in the world both in terms of its legislative and executive oversight powers (Farell, 2007). Together with the Council of the European Union, it constitutes the highest legislative body within the Union. The Parliament consists of 736 members who represent the largest transnational democratic electorate in the world. The European Parliament traces its beginnings to 1952, when the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Union consisting of 78 delegates appointed by national parliaments met for the first time in Strasbourg. The first library was established in 1953, and by the end of 1965 its collections amounted to almost 18,000 titles in 30,000 volumes (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008).

The European Parliament Library's mission is to support the European Parliament's legislative, control, and representational functions by providing high quality information services that are timely, objective, and nonpartisan. The library, located in Brussels, seeks to deliver high quality services effectively, efficiently, and economically (Eurolib, n.d.). Unlike parliament libraries in several European Union countries, which count the public among their clients, the European Parliament Library is very restrictive in terms of usage and its website states it very clearly: "The mission of the Library concerns Parliamentary work and it does not provide services to the general public, students, consultants, lobbyists, external bodies, etc. The access to the Library is restricted to internal users only"

(Eurolib, 2010), with no duty to external researchers or visitors, except for its historical research services. Every year the library adds some 150,000 books to its print collection (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008). The website of the European Parliament hosts a multimedia library that stocks all the video recordings of the parliament's plenary sessions since April 2006 (European Parliament, Multimedia Library).

The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation has been a useful tool for interparliamentary cooperation and information exchange, since it was first established in June 1977 at the request of the speakers of European Parliamentary Assemblies. The center acts as a channel for requests for information whenever one parliament would like to know more about practice and policy in other countries. The center produces comparative analyses, organizes seminars, and conducts surveys on specific topics of interest to parliamentary life (European Centre for Parliamentary Research & Documentation, n.d.). One such comprehensive study, compiled by Elisabeth Dietrich-Schulz, head librarian of the Austrian Parliament, compares and contrasts parliamentary libraries, research and archive services in individual European countries (including Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey, and Russia), the European Union, Israel, and the United States (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008). A similar study, focusing only on Western European countries, was conducted in 2000 by Jennifer Tanfield, the former librarian of the House of Commons.

NORTH AMERICA

United States

In the United States, the Library of Congress (LC) was established by the Congress in 1800. After much of the original collection was destroyed during the War of 1812, Thomas Jefferson sold to the Congress his personal library, consisting of 6,487 books to replace the loss. The year 2000 marked the bicentennial anniversary of the U.S. Library of Congress. To commemorate this historic occasion, a yearlong celebration was developed to include projects, events, programs, publications, and acquisitions that would focus on "leaving a legacy for the future" (Tabb, Cole, Kinney, Underdue, 2003). A commemorative stamp and two commemorative coins were issued to honor the library.

Over the past two centuries, the library's collections have grown both in size and importance and have diversified in formats and coverage. Today the LC is one of the largest and best-equipped libraries in the world, with nearly 142 million items that include more than 32 million cataloged books and other print materials in 470 languages; more than 62 million manuscripts; the largest rare book collection in North America; and the world's largest collection of legal materials, films, maps, sheet music, and sound recordings (LC, n.d., Collections).

The Library of Congress's mission is to make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations. Although it is open to the public, only legislators, Supreme Court justices, and other high-ranking government officials may check out books. Through the U.S. Copyright Office, the LC receives copies of every imprint registered in the country. The LC is the de facto national library and the national bibliographic center of the United States.

As an agency of the legislative branch of the U.S. government, the Library of Congress includes several internal divisions (or service units), among which is the Congressional Research Service (CRS) (LC, n.d., General information). The CRS's primary mission is researching inquiries made by members of Congress, their committees, and staff throughout the legislative process by providing comprehensive and reliable legislative assistance and analysis on a confidential and nonpartisan basis. Its staff of almost 900 employees includes lawyers, economists, reference librarians, and subject specialists in various disciplines who provide expert assistance on a wide range of subjects such as economics, social policy, science, defense, foreign relations, transportation, education, etc. (Tabb, Cole, Kinney, & Underdue, 2003). CRS reports are highly regarded as in-depth, accurate, objective, and timely, but as a matter of policy they are not made directly available to members of the public. The CRS as well as all of the other departments and services offered by the LC are featured in the *Encyclopedia of the Library of Congress: for Congress, the Nation and the world* (Cole & Aikin, 2004), a reference work dedicated to the bicentennial institution.

Canada

In Canada, the parliamentary library dates back to the 1790s, with the creation of the legislative libraries of Upper and Lower Canada. These two separate legislative libraries, each with its own collections, operated until the Canadas united to form the Province of Canada in 1841. The unified collection was destined to accompany the Legislature of the Province of Canada, which travelled for more than a decade between Kingston and Montreal, and then between Toronto and Quebec. This voyage ended in 1857 when Queen Victoria selected the capital of the new Dominion of Canada; her choice, Ottawa, then also became the library's permanent home. The Library of Parliament as an institution was established in 1867, and its legislative basis was set out in 1871 under the Library of Parliament Act. In the 1985 Revised Statutes of Canada, the Library of Parliament Act was consolidated into the Parliament of Canada Act. The legislative provisions have remained substantially unchanged over the years. Currently the Library of Parliament has two service delivery branches: the Parliamentary Research Branch (PRB), created in 1965 that provides research, analysis, and information services to members of Senate and the House

of Commons as well as to parliamentary committees and associations; and the Information and Documentation Branch, which provides reference services to parliamentarians, their staff, and other authorized clients and the public (Landry, 2001). The PRB provides substantial assistance to members of the Senate and House of Commons as well as to parliamentary committees through its subject-matter specialists, including lawyers, economists, scientists, sociologists, and public-policy specialists. In addition to its role within government, the library also plays a public outreach role by providing information about Canada's Parliament to Canadians (Hillmer & Cheung-Gertler, 2010).

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The library and research services of the Asia and Pacific region are relatively young. Several of the parliamentary libraries were created during the post-World War II period, and those of Japan, India, Australia, and the Republic of Korea are among the world's largest.

Japan

The National Diet Library in Japan was established in 1948 on the recommendations of the U.S. mission to Japan. In the course of the overall restructuring of the political system immediately after World War II, the members of the National Diet, Japan's parliament, followed the U.S. Library of Congress model and proposed to establish a parliamentary library for themselves that would provide a national service to the public as well (Ikuhara, 2002).

Republic of Korea

The National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea was established in 1952, in the midst of the 1950–53 Korean War, to provide information services to the members of the National Assembly and legislative support organizations. Since 1998, the library's function has been expanded to the general public. In 2007 it opened the Digital Legislative Resource Center (National Assembly Library, n.d.).

Taiwan

The Legislative Yuan (Parliament of Taiwan) was founded in 1928. Two decades later, in 1949, the Library and Information Service was established to offer reading and library services for the parliamentarians only. In the mid-1980s, the Library and Information Service launched its development project named "Program for Development of Information and Research Services of the Legislative Yuan 1985–1989," which created new legislative reference services and computerized information systems to support the research and lawmaking functions of legislators. In 1999, the Parliamentary Library was established. The original functions of the library that consisted of "disseminating information and extending knowledge" have

expanded, and today, the library counts among its responsibilities supplying online information services to legislators and bridging the gap between citizens and legislature for public policy making (Ku, 2002).

India

The Parliamentary Library of India was established in 1921, during the days of the Central Legislative Assembly, when India was still under British rule. During the preindependence days, the library remained a very small establishment meeting the limited requirements of the Members of the Central Legislative Assembly. It was only after the country's independence, in 1947, and after the Constituent Assembly began drafting a new constitution for free India, that the demands on the library started multiplying. In 1950, when India became a sovereign, democratic republic, the Parliament Library's collections saw the beginning of a systematic expansion, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Joseph, 1996). In 1974 an organizational change occurred, which led to an enhanced role of the library (Joseph, 2000). To keep the parliamentarians well-informed of the day-to-day developments in India and abroad, the Parliament Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service was established to provide research and reference material on legislative measures as well as on a variety of other subjects coming up before the two Houses. The Parliament Library is now housed in the new Parliament Library Building, which was inaugurated in 2002. Currently information provision is performed online by using the library's electronic resources.

Australia

The Australian Parliament was established in 1901, with five departments, one of them being the library. In February 2004, the biggest change in the Australian Parliamentary departments in over one hundred years occurred, when the number of departments was reduced from five to four. At that point a bill was introduced to provide for a statutory office of Parliamentary Librarian and, for the first time, protection in law of the independence of the Parliamentary Library (Calvert, 2006). The new bill spells out the duties of the Parliamentary Librarian and Library, among which is the duty "to provide high quality information, analysis and advice to Senators and Members of the House of Representatives in support of their parliamentary and representational roles." The information must be submitted "in a timely, impartial and confidential manner, and maintaining the highest standards of scholarship and integrity." The bill reinforces for the first time in Australian library legislation the provision of impartial and confidential research support (Calvert, 2006).

New Zealand

In 2008 the New Zealand Parliamentary Library celebrated its 150th anniversary (Martin, 2008b). The October 2008 edition of the *New Zealand*

Library and Information Management Journal contains an article by parliamentary historian John E. Martin about how the Parliamentary Library, its librarians, and supporters have contributed to library development in New Zealand, including the establishment of the country's National Library. The author highlights the development of the newspaper collection, the New Zealand collection and the international documents collection (Martin, 2008a).

Recognizing the importance of promoting parliamentary libraries in Asia and the Pacific, in the late 1990s the IFLA section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments published a book on the subject: *Parliamentary Libraries and Reference Services of Asia and the Pacific*. In the hope that more vital legislatures might further the progress of democracy itself, this volume of papers discussed the activities, structures, and challenges within China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, and other countries (Brian, 1997).

AFRICA

On the African continent, as countries became independent, they elected their first parliaments. The parliamentarians' need for information led to the establishment of parliamentary libraries, with help from Western European countries as well as Canada, the United States, and Australia, which supplied initial collections of books and periodicals and provided training for librarians. An appraisal of the situation of parliamentary libraries in French-speaking countries in Africa indicated that they were inadequately resourced and at best provided only rudimentary library, archive, and information services (Fortin, 1988). A study conducted some twenty years later by Janneke B. Mostert (2005, 2007) found that despite not being very effective, parliamentary libraries in Africa are valued service centers known to actively disseminate information. Depending on the staff available, libraries offer a number of services to parliamentarians, which range from lending services to providing in-depth reports on issues of the day. The study also revealed that parliamentary libraries are underutilized in Africa because parliamentarians use other equally competing information sources largely accessed through the Internet.

In South Africa, electronic information sources are growing rapidly, almost reaching the level of use of print sources. In this country parliamentary libraries have a potential to offer a variety of services to parliamentarians, yet they are not well-utilized, perhaps because of reasons such as poor marketing and innovative information services. Rheina Epstein (2005) mentions that the Information Resource Center, based at Parliament in Cape Town, supplies government information in print or electronic form to members of Parliament, political researchers, other organizations, or members of the public on site or via provincial government

information centers, public information terminals, or a growing number of multi-purpose community centers throughout the country.

FROM PAST TO FUTURE

The new information and research orientation of parliamentary libraries, accelerated by the advent of information technology, the changing pattern of parliamentary politics, and new social and economic developments, raises the question of where they should be placed among special libraries. Cope (2000) points out contradictions facing parliamentary libraries, suggesting a more clearly differentiated “special” role for them as part of a parliamentary “information ecology.” By accepting a wider social responsibility for political communication and political education extending beyond the already richly served parliamentary elite, parliamentary libraries can contribute by way of their information expertise to the evolving concept of participatory democracy. There perhaps awaits a wider role for parliament libraries in the future in their capacity as political agencies.

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