

TRANSFORMATION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

By Karel Sosna

Abstract: For historical reasons, the library shows different periods of development. Today it has launched a well equipped stock and implemented the integrated library system Tinlib. Next on the agenda is a new organizational structure.

The library was founded in 1918 at the same time as the independent Czechoslovak state and its parliament. It was linked, however, to the tradition of the library established in 1857 for the Czech Assembly and the new parliamentary library inherited its stock of books. In the period between the two world wars this new library was regarded as one of the most important centres of cultural and political information in former Czechoslovakia.

The founder of the library and its first director, Dr. Zdeněk Václav Tobolka, took active part in international librarians' meetings and was a founding member of the IFLA at Edinburgh in 1927. He was elected a member of its International and Bibliographical Committee.

During the Second World War the library ceased its activity. After a short period of revival in the years 1945-1948 a long period of stagnation set in. Because of our country's complicated political development parliament lost its raison d'être as a forum for open debate. The original parliamentary library which had been of high quality, suffered a gradual decay. In 1989 it was under-staffed (only 5 librarians), lacked up-to-date technology (there was no PC, fax or xerox) and there was absolute lack of any literature concerning the functioning of a political system in conditions of pluralist parliamentary democracy including fundamental general and specialised encyclopedias, reference books and dictionaries.

The situation now is completely different. In 1990 we have started close cooperation not only with Czech libraries but also in the framework of IFLA with other parliamentary libraries in the world. In this cooperation we worked out a new concept of a modern parliamentary library which is currently being step by step applied by the library.

We have received a big support from the Western parliamentary libraries. The biggest one we have received from the U.S. Congress through the Library of Congress. There were almost 200 000 USD that we spent in three ways.

1) We have bought many books, periodicals and CD-ROMs to fulfill the gap in our information sources I mentioned above. 2) For most of the librarians two-week courses have been arranged at the Library of Congress in Washington and 3) our Parliamentary Library has been equipped with means of the modern information technology (PC, CD-ROM drivers etc.).

Our library is now almost fully automated on the basis of the integrated library system Tinlib. We have already implemented three of four basic moduls of the system it means acquisition, cataloguing and serials control. With the circulation modul we shall start in January 1996. Our LAN is a part of the integrated information system of the whole parliament so that each member of parliament who has his PC has also direct access in our online catalogue. Through the Internet our library has also access in databasis of other libraries and information centres. In this connection I would like to stress that our library as the first library in our country takes over daily through Internet data from the National Bibliography of the National Library in Prague and disseminates them among its users.

The library serves primarily the members of the Czech Parliament as well as the staff of the Offices of both legislative bodies it means Chamber of Deputies and Senat. Subject to the approval of the library's director, holdings may also be lent to serious researches from state and governmental bodies, academic institutes and universities. Public use of the library is limited and can only take place when no chamber of the parliament is sitting.

Nowadays the library is a part of the Press Department of the Office of the Czech Parliament. Under a draft of a new organisation structure for the Office of the Czech Parliament which is due to be approved in December of this year the library would become either one of the departments of a broader information division or an autonomous department of the Office of the Czech Parliament subordinated directly to the head of the Office.

There are 11 people now working in the library. 5 of them are university-educated, 4 have a secondary diploma and two have basic educational qualifications and professional experience in the library.

The main book collection of the library has about 200 000 titles form such fields as law, politics, economy, philosophy, sociology, modern history, culture, statistics and geography. The library also holds encyclopedias, dictionaries, travel books, charts etc. Accessions account is for about 1300 items per year. The library has

the right to a deposit copy from Czech publishing houses. Foreign literature is acquired through purchase, gift or exchange. As a deposition library of the UN the library holds in stock the principal documents of the UN including selected publications by all UN agencies and other international bodies such as the Interparliamentary Union, the International Court of Justice etc. The core of the library is created by the comprehensive collection of the acts and publications of the Czechoslovak parliament since its inception, including bills, parliamentary prints, verbatim records and statutes. It also holds the law and parliamentary publications of 14 foreign parliaments acquired by exchange.

As for periodicals the library has the right to a deposit copy of all Czech dailies and about 300 other titles.

The library acquires also about 70 foreign periodicals.

The library publishes information for the members of the Czech Parliament. There are so called Information Sheets of the Parliamentary Library devoted to the different current topics. List of new books are published monthly and a survey of the legislative activity of the Czech Parliament is published twice a year. The latter is also published in an English version.

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