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# MEMORIES OF WOLFGANG DIETZ AND GERHARD HAHN: GERMAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO POST-WAR DEVELOPMENTS IN LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY PRACTICE AND HISTORY

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Two world wars shattered many existing German international library relationships. The Nazi period led to a deliberate curtailment by this regime of many arrangements in this sector only just recovering from the damages inflicted during and after the First World War. After 1945 strenuous efforts to reintegrate German libraries with their Western brethren led to remarkably swift results. The role of IFLA needs no description here, but it is on record that the German library profession eagerly sought to recover some of its enormous losses, both material and ethical, through membership in any avenue open to do so. IFLA proved ideal for this purpose and fruitful results were soon evident across the whole German library sector.

Part of the result of the Second World War was a realisation in the West of the considerable deficiencies in the parliamentary libraries of many of our countries. They were inadequate to meet the needs of the now radically different new world. In Australia this consciousness was shared by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library where circumstances and personalities were favourable to meeting this challenge. Federal Parliamentarians were keen for expanded and updated library services to aid them; legislative staff and its leaders seemed eager to ride the wave of modernisation<sup>[1]</sup>.

A new post-war mentality was now visibly taking root, and economic and political developments all combined to create a new type of parliamentary library, first in Canberra and then increasingly, in the state parliaments of the

country. Parallel developments were occurring in many overseas parliaments and the role of the US Congressional Library became paramount as both a model to be emulated and a source of encouragement and generous advice when called on. At Westminster a wave of innovations showed the desire of the Mother of Parliaments not to be left out.

To meet these new legislative and administrative demands many changes were implemented and funds to underpin the changes were also available. One great innovation was the employment of subject specialists who were not librarians or educated in this profession. Tentatively Canberra's Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, following the Washington model, employed a handful of such experts with resounding success amongst its patrons.

Parallels with the situation in West Germany and its Parliament, the Bundestag, are obvious and made a mutual degree of interest in developments here and there fruitful. This was almost entirely informal since German developments were heavily indebted to its very close relationship with the US Congressional Library and, in particular, its Congressional Research Service. Gerhard Hahn, one of the subjects of this Paper, was in fact seconded for six months to work in the Congressional Research Service in order to study its organisation and methods. He wrote a substantial Paper on his observations which is an important historical signpost in parliamentary library history.

The remarks above are intended to suggest something of the environment of the 1960s and beyond, but to go into them in requisite detail lies beyond our present aim which is to focus on two German librarians who were significant in the development of the modern profile of the Bundestag Library and the practice of post-war legislative librarianship. Since the writer had many dealings and meetings with both these men over an extended period, this account takes on the nature of a personal memoir. The German impact in Australia should, however, not be overstated.

## **Part One**

### **Dr Gerhard Hahn, 1932-2017**

Dr Hahn had wide experience in various types of learned and administrative libraries in Germany before transferring to the Bundestag Library in 1971. By temperament and academic training he showed himself to be an expert researcher with abiding interests in technical aspects of modern library practice where automation was now beginning to play an increasingly vital part. Slavic and Eastern European studies were interests he followed for some time. The early moves to standardise cataloguing procedures along lines emanating mostly from the US were influential in Bonn where automation was successfully introduced at an early date.

My contacts with Dr Hahn were largely related to his work as an historian of the former Reichstag Library, This Library was largely destroyed in Berlin at the end of the Second World War. The history of this Library dates back to the formation of the united Germany under Prussian leadership and Dr Hahn states that the Reichstag Library came into being in 1872. Apart from meeting Dr Hahn on trips to Bonn, I corresponded with him for a period of years during which time I took a continuing interest in his historical work and was very keen that he finish his last venture, a re-examination of the still mysterious fire of 1933 in the Reichstag building which had portentous results for the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler and the fate of Germany and of Europe at this period. To the best of my knowledge, the review I did of his history of 1997 which appeared in *Legislative Studies*, Spring 1998, 105-120 is the most comprehensive to have appeared. This work is totally in German, most comprehensively documented and for a work of some 759 pages is written in a lucid and readable style. Strangely enough, the author says little about how he came to write this monumental contribution in his retirement without apparent support of any kind from the present Bundestag.

Attempts to obtain a photograph to accompany this brief and partial account have proved fruitless. Astonishing as this may seem, it is equally true that this magisterial history is apparently not widely known, even in Germany, where the historical profession is so prominent. Few Australians will know the work either since it is in a language not widely studied here. A translation into

English would probably not prove popular, so I suspect that the review I did in 1998 will have to serve as a very poor substitute for the original <sup>[2]</sup>.

I have no doubt that Dr Gerhard Hahn has produced a masterpiece of historical scholarship which will for long remain a pinnacle in its field. In happier times such an author would be considered a national treasure.

## **Part 2**

### **Wolfgang Dietz, 1921-2017**

Wolfgang Dietz made an active contribution through his visits to Australia where he participated in some of the Australian parliamentary library conferences. Visitors to the Bonn Library were in return warmly welcomed, no matter whether there for professional reasons or out of curiosity to observe the effects of the German economic miracle in operation in the Bonn Library. The funds available to this Library seemed light years ahead of those our libraries could hope to achieve. Wolfgang Dietz was very active in his membership of IFLA and would be known to a number of Australians from this context.

My connections with Wolfgang Dietz were of a closer personal kind than those I had with Dr Hahn who was for a period Deputy to Dr Dietz. I spent some very pleasant times in Bonn as guest of Wolfgang and Giesela Dietz and they had also been my guests in Sydney. Wolfgang was a fluent teller of colourful stories of his life which embraced military service with the Afrika Korps, a period as a prisoner of war in southern American states, life in Leipzig, his hometown in East Germany until his flight to West Germany before the Wall was erected. He had professional qualifications from the East and had to begin afresh in West Germany.

Automation of library operations was a special enthusiasm of his working life. He worked in the Bundestag Library from 1954 until he retired in 1986.

The word I associate with Dr Dietz is energy. Of smaller stature, he was overflowing with energy and ideas. He had a very gregarious affability and social traits which made his job as chief in such a politically sensitive milieu rewarding. He was an easy mixer in professional circles, especially at the

international level of IFLA where he had many friends from abroad. If angered for some reason he could be fiery, but this was not often observed by me.

From Wolfgang Dietz I learned much about the German library world as well as about the non-public aspects of the political world which in those years was centred in Bonn. He was a stimulating person to be with and a very good friend to me over many years.

On his retirement he was presented with a splendid international Festschrift<sup>[3]</sup> to mark the occasion. This work contains contributions from a number of Anglo-Saxon parliamentary libraries in English, but the spectrum is truly international, reflecting in an impressive manner the achievements of parliamentary libraries which he had witnessed and also helped achieve. It is also testament to the far-reaching friendships which marked a vigorous and committed life in parliamentary librarianship.

It is striking that both Dietz and Hahn should in all likelihood be remembered in years to come for the two books associated with them. They both died in 2017 and their received very feeble recognition from their former employer. No matter, to those who know the values of our calling, their books still live.

## **Conclusion**

I feel grateful that in my life I have been privileged to know some men and women of exceptional character and personality. With some I have had deeper personal relations than might be ordinarily expected. My long interest in Germany and German institutions has been hugely enriched by this and to both Wolfgang Dietz and Gerhard Hahn I express my grateful thanks for the happy circumstances which grew from our friendships. I end by quoting from the poet C.F. Meyer<sup>[4]</sup>.

Mein letztes Wort ein Wort der Dankbarkeit.

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4. Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, 1825-92. *"My last word, a word of thanks."*