

# Capitol Blunder

The Congressional space grab that would take the incomplete Madison Library, the new building of the Library of Congress, and convert it into another House Office Building is one more monumental blunder in the ludicrous ad hoc history of Government building on Capitol Hill.

It seems that for the House the Rayburn Building has been less than a home; atrociously designed, outrageously expensive and disgracefully inefficient, it was outmoded from the day the legislators moved in. The prevailing philosophy, however, seems to be that one bad mistake deserves another. The new library is planned specifically for large-scale technical operations. Its conversion to provide office space would produce, at best, another solid gold lemon.

It is particularly unfortunate that this misguided caper should take place just when the office of the Architect of the Capitol has finally embarked on a master plan study for Capitol Hill. This worthy project, at least a century overdue, has a \$350,000-appropriation to examine the space and building needs of the various branches of Government on the Hill and balance them against suitable sites for a rational, coordinated construction program.

The threatened new library has been in the planning stage for fifteen years. A replacement, going through the same complex legislative processes, overlapping committees and bureaucratic lag, would not materialize in any less time. The Library of Congress's burgeoning, priceless collections are now dispersed and in desperate need of proper housing. Although the new structure, architecturally, will be no more than a huge, technically efficient mass of near-windowless floors stuffed into a pompous marble shroud, it is a desperately needed, carefully planned facility.

The issue boils down to still more Congressional chaos versus the national cultural heritage. Underlying even this, however, is the relentless wrong-headedness and low architectural level of all Capitol Hill building programs.

This is a state of affairs that may finally be taking a turn for the better, if Congress cooperates; but building-snatching is no solution.