

Business

So where is Sydney heading?

By SANDY PEARCE

THE RAPID pace of property development in Sydney and the squeezing out of theatres, cinemas, retail stores, and boutiques in the face of growing demand for office space was the theme of a recent conference "Sydney . . . backwards or forwards?" organised by the Sydney branch of the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales.

With perfect timing, considering the rash of publicity that has attended statements by retailers that they are actively considering development of their vast mid-city department store sites, the institute attracted a bumper attendance of developers, real-estate men and representatives of the beleaguered minorities.

Most of the big guns were on the side of the developers, considering that land prices are quickly making retailing, hotels, etc., uneconomic. And office development, which can charge what the traffic will bear, provides a built-in barometer with the law of supply and demand acting for it.

But the conference's aim was to cause a major rethink; to look at present and projected development and see just what the developers hope for and what the people expect of and want from their city. Do they want retail shops to remain in the city proper or are they sufficiently conditioned to shopping in regional centres? If so, are the retailers expecting too much to run expensive and less productive (in terms of capital employed) city stores for the prestige of having a central city headquarters?

The same could also be said of the cinemas, although multi-cinema complexes planned for the city by the movie chains will echo developments which have already taken place in London, to produce a greater cash flow from a given area of land. This, sadly, will undoubtedly mean the end of those marvellous plaster and marble edifices such as the State, the Regent and the Plaza.

A more dismal fate is likely to befall live theatre in Sydney, because of their need for a greater area than cinemas. On this basis an impassioned plea was made by the flamboyant entrepreneur Harry M. Miller, who said that if Australia was suddenly covered in the second Ice Age, archaeologists 500 years later wouldn't find much to recommend the society which had existed. He then went on to impress on the developers present that while a theatre or cinema as part of their development might not earn them as much in rent as offices, it would at least draw people back to the city — particularly the "desolate"



A speaker at the conference puts his view of Sydney's development

northern end of the city toward Circular Quay.

He said that the likelihood of greatly reduced working weeks made it imperative that steps be taken to plan for the extra leisure time. He added that by cinemas and theatres, department stores and shops being bulldozed to make way for high-rise office development, the cities were making it more likely that they would offer very little involvement for the leisured workers in 30 years' time.

"But theatres aren't rented out like office space. I don't want to wake up one morning next week and find that the firm of Hooker Dusseldorp and Graf (now that would be a fairly shattering combination) has thrown up an enormous skyscraper incorporating a theatre and they're after me to rent it at some fantastic price. Clearly, no one renting out a theatre can charge \$9, \$12 or \$15 a foot these days and expect to have permanent tenancy. The new theatres should be regarded as traffic generators and costed accordingly," he added.

Another speaker, George Clarke, director of planning at Urban Systems Corporation, pointed to the rapid changes which had overtaken Sydney in the past ten years and how the character of the city had changed from a single-centred metropolis catering for retailing, wholesaling, office and major community services to a city in 1970 which had become a truly many-centred urban region. The central business district itself had contracted from the southern end of the city, moved northward toward Sydney Cove, jumped the harbor, spilling over and expanding into North Sydney. And, as Mr. Clarke put

it, in an attempt to balance development with economics and aesthetics, Sydney needs a definitive statement of the kind of city it wants to be.

Earlier, the Minister for Tourism, Mr. Willis, acknowledged the problems of all the vested interests, such as developers and the old-time city attractions, and said that it would be essential to streamline administrative procedures dealing with major developments. In his position as Minister for Tourism, Mr. Willis was mostly concerned with the shortage of hotel accommodation in Sydney and the likelihood that this would increase as demand grew, while hotels were pulled down and replaced with more lucrative office development. He told the conference that to overcome this situation it would be necessary to identify and suitably zone sites for hotel development, such as The Rocks area; also that a more generous floor-area/site ratio should be adopted for hotels as compared with other forms of commercial buildings to stimulate the construction of new hotels in preference to office development.

Coming trials in trade practices

By PETER SAMUEL

WITH INDUSTRIAL militancy tending to grow in Australia, the Government is having to pay more attention to its credentials as a conciliator.

For a Marxist-thinking minority, of