

Rebuilding Sydney—Without A Fixed Purpose

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THERE is a growing awareness that all is not well with the development of Sydney and its surroundings, a conviction that things might be done better than they are being done and that we should know better than we do know where we are going.

It always used to be argued that radical city improvements were impossible because of the costs involved, but today the whole city is being rebuilt before our eyes. What wonderful results we could achieve if all this expenditure of money and effort, all this rebuilding, was to some agreed purpose and pattern!

Instead we see the obscene smear of haphazard suburbanisation spreading like a stain over new areas of bushland and market gardens while, in the centre, every historic landmark is a likely site for another tower of steel and concrete to congest beyond endurance the surrounding narrow streets, and dehumanise the city still further. Even the remaining trees are doubly threatened; not only by the developers, but often by our civic guardians themselves; and amidst the riot of development one wonders to whose advantage it all is except the dealers in land and buildings.

"You can't stop progress," we are told, but it might be worth while considering where progress lies. Is the city becoming more attractive to live in, pleasanter to move about in, more efficient to work in, quicker to travel to? If not, where is the progress? If we don't let the big businesses do exactly as they want they will all go to Melbourne, people fear—while in Melbourne the same companies are all threatening to move to Sydney! Similar controls in both capitals would solve that particular problem.

Follies Repeated?

To be sensible of course we must admit that all this activity is a sign of youthful health and vigour which few would wish to exchange for the peaceful beauty of a historic monument; but with all our modern technical skill and social awareness we should be ashamed of ourselves if we could do no better than repeat, at this late date, the inhuman follies of a 19th century Manchester or Pittsburgh.

One difficulty is that the voices of advice often take the form of special pleas on behalf of some single desirable objective like better highways or better housing, and there is always the fond hope of some single simple way to put everything right. But, as in most big problems, there are many things that must be done together over a period of time before we can hope for improvement and, to do them, help is needed from a variety of people—elected representatives, public officials and private individuals. That is a big part of the difficulty—for successful planning must be a combined operation.

Traffic Problem

The traffic problem is an example of this need for a many-sided attack and there is general agreement among those who have given sufficient thought to the matter as to the methods needed for dealing with it. Some of the more important of these are:

- (1) Limitation of building bulk and floor space in relation to traffic and parking possibilities of the surrounding areas.
- (2) Reduction of the long-distance journey to work by breaking down big concentrations of employment near the centre and thus reducing rush-hour traffic—that is to say local decentralisation of factories and offices.
- (3) Creation of "traffic precincts" by improving existing road patterns in built-up areas, eliminating through traffic from service roads and standing vehicles from through roads.
- (4) Provision of sufficient parking space, by private developers and in public car parks, to take standing cars off the through roads.
- (5) Improved frequency, comfort and speed in public transport services of all kinds, for transport must inevitably

play the biggest part in moving people and goods in and around the central city area. The heart of the matter therefore is the need for co-ordination and co-operation between a number of quite different authorities and interests. That is the case with almost every town planning problem, and that is what makes them so intractable.

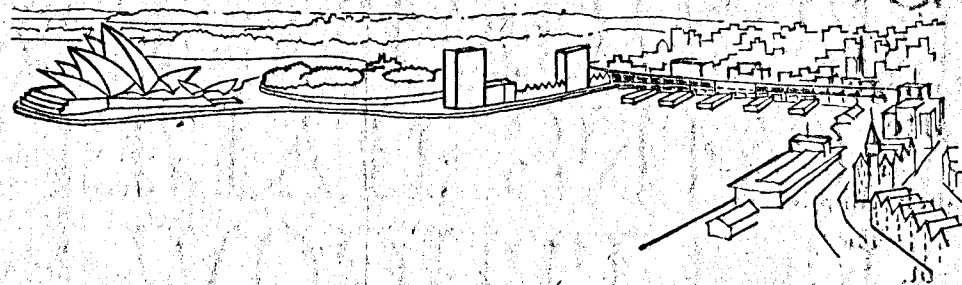
We all feel the charm of that subtle thing we call "character" in our cities; but character is something that the steamroller of modern production methods and universal communications is obliterating in one city after another from Tokyo to Berlin. Sydney still retains a good many of those special features that let you know that you are not in Melbourne or anywhere else—Surely we should have learned by now that we cannot expect to get good results by leaving things to chance and hoping that the individual efforts of numerous developers on a multiplicity of odd-shaped bits of land will add up to a city we can be proud of. With the best will in the world a property owner, wishing to redevelop his narrow city site, hemmed in by other developers whose intentions he cannot know, has no alternative but to build to the maximum permitted limit and hope for the best.

Unified Scheme

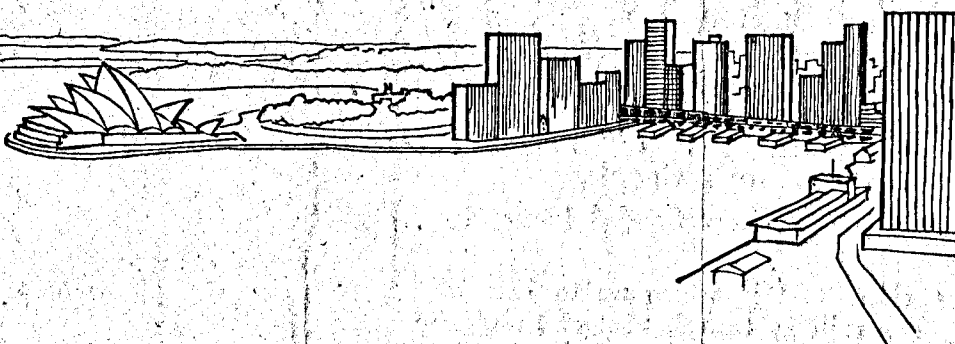
The first essential is a unified scheme of development; the City Council is still struggling to produce one for the whole central city, but it looks as if it may be too late. In the meantime, given the appropriate organisation—a public and private enterprise partnership—and a more dynamic, more positive conception of "town planning," not merely as a police weapon to control undesirable developments but as a creative technique for improved urban building, there are a dozen key locations in Sydney where it would still be possible to achieve the kind of developments to bring both pride and profit.

The Queen Victoria Markets building is nearing the end of its economic life and rebuilding will surely happen soon. Let us plan now to make the open forecourt which the Town Hall has long needed for its proper dignity and to provide at the same time a city square to set off the fine new multi-storey hotel or office building which could occupy half the ground space of the present Markets.

Things are already happening at the back of the Registrar-General's Department where a big new building is appearing. The whole of this parliamentary and legal precinct, so splendidly placed between the Domain and Martin Place needs treating as a unit for redevelopment—from the Mitchell Library to St. Mary's Cathedral. The hospital they say is to go; whatever the plans are we should see them and make sure they are good enough for this fine site before it is too late. There is still the possibility of widening the top of Martin



Sydney Cove: There is still a chance of improvement.



Sydney Cove tomorrow? Outside, looking in—but how about inside looking out?

place to make a proper forecourt for the buildings beyond and to provide even more profitable sites for really worthwhile buildings on the corners of Martin Place and Macquarie Street—which should of course be designed in conjunction. The whole of the area from one skyscraper to the next—until you have a wall of them between the city and the Harbour? At least we should have an aim, a scheme, at least we should do better than leave it to chance!

Full employment, universal education and shorter working hours—all these and similar trends are allowing people a freer choice of where they will work and live and shops and spend their money. In other words the attractive places, the convenient shops, the clean factories are the ones that attract the workers, the customers, the holiday makers, the good business. The loss in the centre of Sydney, because of the confusion there, is as yet only a relative loss to the more attractive suburbs, but it is enough to make any half-smart businessman realise that efficiency and customer appeal are just as important in the case of his business area as they are for the product he sells.