

Artists for Utzon

SIR — We are representative of major groups of artists within the Australian community.

We wish to give expression to our opinion that the recently announced decision to supplant or to accept the resignation of the Danish architect, Joern Utzon, statutory designer and architect-in-charge of the building of the Sydney Opera House, is both unwise and unjust.

It is unlikely to achieve any of the advantages claimed for it and it places the outcome of this great building venture in jeopardy.

We believe that public disquiet, which spreads far beyond the shores of Australia, ought to be met by the setting up of an impartial enquiry and we here set down some of the questions to which we, as members of the electorate, consider answer should be made.

Since every recent action of the Government, in this matter, has been publicly justified by promises of retrenched spending and early completion, we believe answer should be made:

What economies can the Minister for Public Works say for certain will be effected, in either time or cost, by the expedient of exchanging an architect of international reputation (together with his small staff of specialists in this building type, against whom charges of incompetence have emphatically not been proven) for a panel of minor local men and their numerous non-specialist assistants?

This new team is to work at exactly the same fee, but will inevitably have a backlog of nine years' groundwork to make good before it can even understand the questions put to it, unless the intention is to instruct them to scrap Mr Utzon's concept and to complete the building with a conventional economy-substitute third stage.

Since the Minister for Public Works has asserted that he has in his possession facts damaging to Mr Utzon's reputation, without ever having produced any, we consider answer should be made. What are these facts which are withheld — if they exist?

Purity

If the architect is easily proved guilty of the crime of having placed purity of conception and splendor of execution before considerations of economy, this may be because it was his interpretation — as it is ours — of the brief to him that this should be done.

We do not need the evidence of an enquiry or of anything but what is placed before our eyes to know that Mr Utzon and his team are possessed of a fine, unique and practical imagination, of which we have already

tasted the first flavor of the fruit.

We think there is a real danger that we and our children are to be denied, forever, the enjoyment of the mature crop from this tree — and this for very bad reasons.

We believe answer should be made to this question: whether, out of the accumulated resources in energy and material, which give Australia a higher standard of living than any nation except America, we and our elected representatives ought to want to spend some part, (however ridiculously small, by the standards of industrial promotion, weaponry or space exploration) upon the creation of superlative amenities such as the Sydney Opera House gave promise of becoming?

After all, such amenities will be handed down for the enjoyment and inspiration of our children's children.

Or ought all our resources to be expended on the short-term satisfaction of the utilitarian needs of ourselves?

New law

Since there has been placed on the statute book a State law of which the sense remains that the building is to be completed substantially in accordance with Joern Utzon's evolving concept, we consider answer should be made.

What cogent reasons justify a decision, of which the effect is greatly to increase the probability that Mr Utzon's intentions with regard to the vital functional heart of the building (stages one and two, however gracefully, provide only shelter and containment for stage three) will be frustrated and nullified; and that, instead, the building will receive a hybrid compromise completion, which will be an inspiration to no one.

—TWENTY-ONE SIGNATURES appeared on the letter.

The letter was signed by Harold Abbott, head, National Art School; Gordon Andrews, past president, IDIA; Dennis Colsey, director, Darlinghurst Gallery; Lyndon Dadswell, senior lecturer, National Art School, past president, Society of Sculptors; Mollie Douglas, past president, Potters' Society of NSW; James Gleeson, artist, art critic, Sydney Sun and Sun-Herald; Neville Gruzman, president, Craft Association of Australia; John Henshaw, artist, critic, member International Art Critics' Association; Frank Hinder, president, Stage Designers' Association, past president, Contemporary Art Society.

Also Mervyn Horton, editor, Art and Australia; Alan Ingham, past president, Society of Sculptors; Elwyn Lynn, artist, critic, president, Contemporary Art Society; Michael Nicholson, president, Society of Sculptors and Associates; Lorna Nimmo, past president, Australian Water Color Institute; Peter Rushforth, president, Potters' Association of NSW; Brian Stratton, president, Australian Water Color Institute; David Strachan, president, Society of Artists; Helen Sweeney, writer; Wallace Thornton, artist, art critic, Sydney Morning Herald; Mary White, director, Mary White School of Art, past president, Interior Designers; Weaver Hawkins, vice-president, Contemporary Art Society of NSW.