

THE AUSTRALIAN

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The right rebuke for fumbling

NO MORE FITTING rebuke could be made to the Government of New South Wales than that the Sydney Opera House may now be superseded as a home for opera, as well as ballet, by the new Melbourne Arts Centre.

If this should happen, as seems likely, it would make the disintegration of the interior of the Opera House as much of a farce as a tragedy.

The Melbourne centre has not once deviated from its original plans, except to improve them. Neither have costs risen there appreciably.

The Victorian Government has not once attempted to interfere with the architect or the building committee. Day-to-day discussions between Roy Grounds, the architect, and Eric Westbrook, director of the National Gallery of Victoria, have produced a flexible, growing, satisfying solution to internal problems.

Both the Melbourne Arts Centre and the Opera House are magnificent buildings and both are based on original and arresting designs.

But whereas the concept of one has been fulfilled, the concept of the other has been smashed in the most inane, irresponsible and heart-breaking fashion, simply by a change of government.

The Minister, Mr Davis Hughes, who presided over the resignation of one of the world's great architects and replaced him with a committee, and who, as an uninformed layman, is now travelling the world trying to inform himself, completely misjudged public opinion.

Nobody cares a great deal how much the Opera House costs. It is being paid for by the gamblers anyway. But it could be, in our day, one of the seven wonders of the world, like the pyramids or the Taj Mahal.

But to be so, its interior must match the soaring external sails and there is nobody in this country who should dare to take over formal and acoustic solutions worked out by Joern Utzon.

It is in fact a mystery to architects all over the world how architects here could have been persuaded to stretch their professional ethics as far as to take over a colleague's work.

It is exactly like trying to finish somebody else's sculpture or to re-paint an artist's picture according to official desires.

The Opera House was always more than a built-up blueprint. It grew and flowered as it went and as the architect found answers to engineering problems not tackled before. But a government, more used to frustration than flowering, put a stop to that and will have to bear the consequences throughout history.

Governments—and Ministers—come and go, but monuments remain. It would be deserved if all that remained was a monument to the present N.S.W. government's cultural barbarism.