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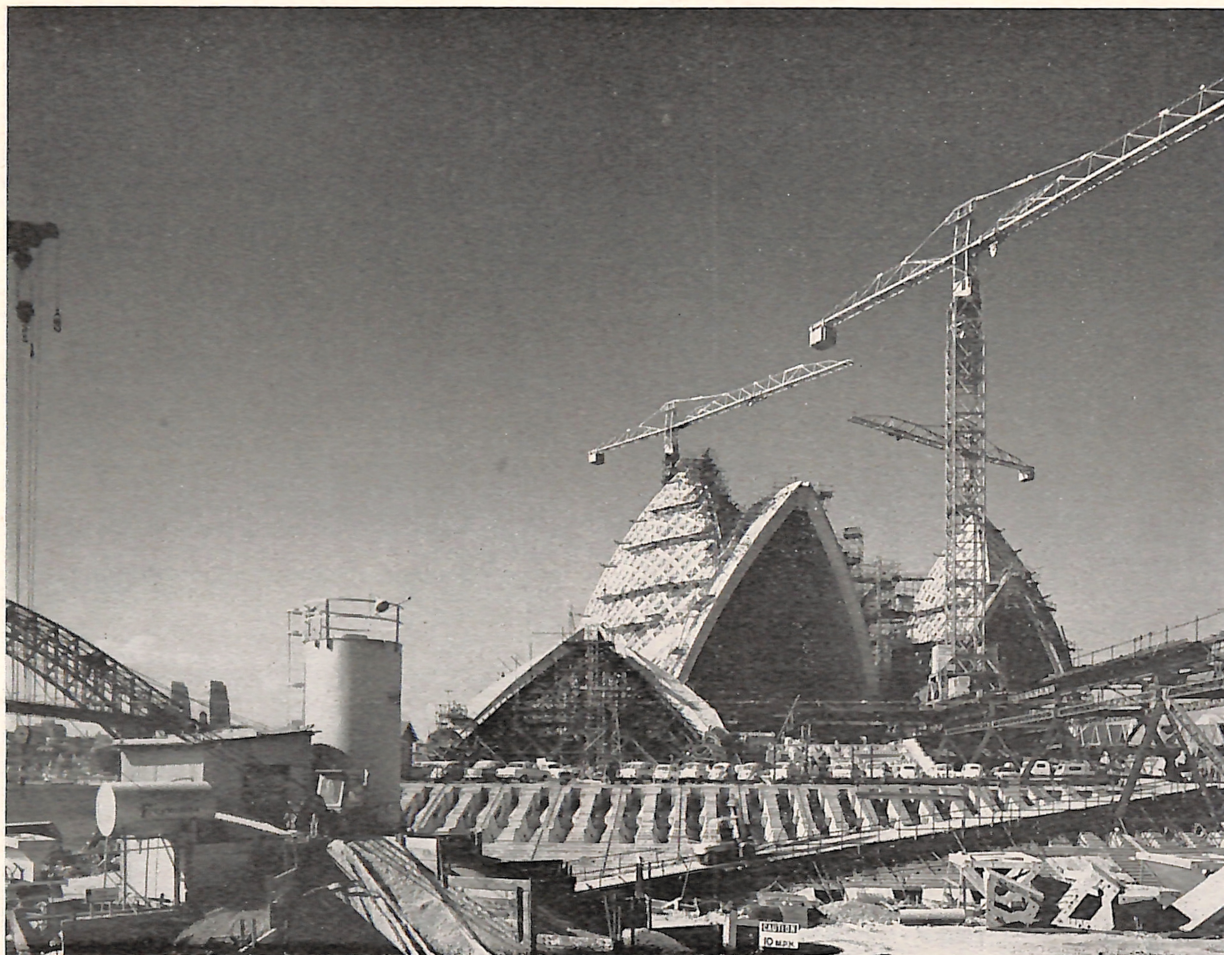


Photo: David Moore

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE PROJECT

¶ On Tuesday, April 19, 1966, the NSW Minister for Public Works (Mr. Davis Hughes) announced the panel of architects to work on the Sydney Opera House, under the NSW Govt. architect (Mr. E. H. Farmer). The panel: Rudder Littlemore and Rudder Pty. Ltd., represented by Mr. D. S. Littlemore; Hanson, Todd and Partners, represented by Mr. L. Todd; and Mr. Peter Hall, a design architect in the NSW Govt. arch'ts branch of the Public Works Dept. Mr. P. Hall will be responsible for design, Mr. L. Todd for contract documents, and Mr. D. Littlemore for supervision. Mr. Farmer will be virtually the "senior partner" co-ordinating design, supervision and administration. Mr. Hughes was reported in the daily newspapers as saying that he had never accepted the \$50 million estimate, that it might now be found that the total cost of the building would be less, and that he did not think the panel would translate the ideas of one man into actual practice.

¶ Other events of significance over the past month, relating to the Opera House include the following:

¶ At a General Meeting of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects on March 22, 1966, the following resolutions were passed:

1. Having due regard to the national and international

significance of this great project, this meeting considers that it is the duty of every architect to withhold participation in the Sydney Opera House project until an appropriate committee of enquiry e.g. a Royal Commission reports upon the history of the construction of the Opera House, the events leading up to the resignation of its architect Jorn Utzon and indicates the proper course now to be followed".

2. "That this meeting endorses the effort of the President and the Executive Committee of the N.S.W. Chapter to effect a reconciliation between the NSW Government and the architect (Mr. J. Utzon)".

3. "That this meeting endorses the action taken by the President and Council of the R.V.I.A. in publishing the statement "We believe every effort should be made to achieve a reconciliation between the parties and that it is vital that the original architect be retained for a project of such individual, national and international importance".

4. "That the President be requested to convey the three resolutions adopted by this meeting to the Federal President, the Presidents of all other State Chapters, and to the Press tomorrow (March 23)".

5. "That this meeting commend Mr. Ronald Lyon for his skill and patience in chairing the debate on this very important matter".

¶ The President of the R.V.I.A. (Mr. Stanley M. C. Evans) received this letter from the President of the R.A.I.A. (Mr. Gavin Walkley):

"The resignation of Mr. Jorn Utzon as architect of the Sydney Opera House and the subsequent efforts of the NSW Chapter to assist in a reconciliation between Mr. Utzon and his client, have given rise to some misapprehensions on the part of the members of the R.A.I.A. In particular I would like to refer to the frequent references to some form of 'boycott' by the profession of the Opera House work. No matter how much one may regret the termination of Mr. Utzon's services, I understand that he has resigned, and the Minister of Public Works of NSW has advised that the resignation remains in force. Assuming that the formalities associated with the termination of his services are in due course properly carried out, it would be improper for any member of the Institute to endeavour to prevent other architectural services being engaged. I would be pleased if you would make this known in whatever manner you think best to the members of your Chapter".

¶ In Sydney, there was great activity. On 2nd March, a deputation of some 25 architects, disturbed at the thought of Jorn Utzon being removed to make way for Mr. Davis Hughes' "Panel of Architects" without some considerable investigation and a firm statement of policy by the NSW Chapter, asked the President, Mr. Ron Gilling, to hold a Special General Meeting to air members' views. He refused. Nearly four weeks later, on Monday 28th, he presided at the first General Meeting called since the crisis began—on a motion proposed by himself and Messrs. Bryce Mortlock and Geoff Moline—a vote of confidence on his own and his council's actions during this time. It is hard to imagine why a motion destined to split the Chapter down the middle should be proposed at a time when the only issue of importance to a huge majority of members was the return of Utzon to complete the Opera House.

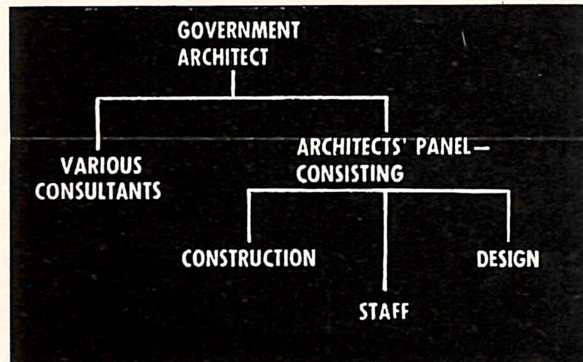
A Motion signed by 120 NSW members calling for architects to shun the job pending full investigation and the Institute's clearance on ethics had already been lodged at the Chapter H.Q. Victorian architects had overwhelmingly carried a similar motion a week earlier (and incidentally voted appreciation of NSW Council's efforts, which should have eased their conscience). Petitions signed by 500 Victorian and 350 Queensland members and students and correspondence from all over the world demanding that Utzon be retained had been received by the Institute, the Premier and the "Utzon-in-Charge" Committee, and, most important, Mr. Hughes had decided to delay his selection of his "Architects' Panel" until the Institute had indicated its position with regard to Utzon's replacement. Now was the time to show the Government a united front.

But Mr. Gilling refused to withdraw his motion or allow any motion supporting Mr. Utzon to be debated at the meeting. As the meeting drew nearer rival factions could only ask each other "what good will come of this?" A defeat would not immediately oust Council, for they would have to remain as caretakers pending elections and would be unlikely to implement the desires of a victorious Utzon-in-Charge group. A victory on this motion could only benefit Mr. Hughes and vindicate (to a degree dependent on the closeness of the vote) Mr. Gilling, the select committee and the Council. Either way, it would be a hollow victory. Utzon and Hughes would be no nearer to reconciliation and the Chapter would declare itself to the public weak and divided. It would serve no purpose to go into the miserable events of that Monday night in sordid detail.

Nearly every architect in Sydney had a grandstand view of a sad and unnecessary domestic squabble which has broken the friendships of years, destroyed much patient work by Chapter Committees and could well reverberate for some time to come. The conduct of the meeting was unusual.

1. The President refused to relinquish the Chair and as Chairman, proposed his own motion in defence of himself and the Council. 2. No amendments of any kind were allowed. 3. A resolution that "the motion be not put"—a final desperate attempt to avoid a schism in the Chapter—was disallowed. 4. A secret ballot was refused. Employers and employees were sitting cheek by jowl. The vote was taken on a show of hands. In the interests of the Chapter, Regulations should be changed so that this procedure can never happen again. The motion "that this Chapter has confidence in the President and Chapter Council in his actions with regard to the Sydney Opera House" was carried 369 votes to 293. The worst possible of results—a deep

gloom settled over the Utzon-in-Charge group, but there was no elation on the part of the victors, only the helpless query "where does that get us?" To Mr. Gilling and the Council, the vote was too close to offer relief, for 283 of their colleagues (including the cream of the profession) had declared no confidence in them. Outside they were met by a stunned group of students who had quietly stood in the corridors throughout the three-hour meeting and whose disgust added to the general depression. The evening was not quite as futile as it appeared—through the smokescreen emerged a massive professional respect for Utzon's competence as architect for the Opera House and a total rejection of the idea of anyone attempting to take over control. The Sydney Morning Herald's leader of March 30th, urged Mr. Hughes to reconsider the case and goes on . . . "It is difficult to see how any architect could accept such conditions, let alone Mr. Utzon, an architect with a world reputation. The only possible excuse for imposing those conditions would be that Mr. Utzon had proved himself incompetent. This may be Mr. Hughes' opinion but, if one can interpret the rather turgid manoeuvres in the Institute of Architects, it is not the opinion of the vast majority of architects either in New South Wales or Victoria". Utzon emerges as a man of honour, refusing to negotiate on a proposal totally against his principles, purely in order to keep talking with the hope of improving the situation during negotiations. It is not difficult to appreciate Utzon's selection of the word "naive" in referring to Council's efforts on his behalf. They were attempting to play backroom politics with a tough professional and Mr. Hughes was killing them. At successive meetings during negotiations the Minister's attitude (far from bending over backwards as he benignly claimed) had hardened and Utzon's position on the proposed chain of command had deteriorated (see Hughes' diagram below. Under the Design heading, place Utzon.).



For a week or so it appeared that little was done on either side. Mr. Hughes' promised announcement of an Architects' Panel mercifully failed to materialise and the Press moved to other matters. Under the surface, sporadic activity continued—new factions, who had hitherto played no part in the proceedings, began negotiations with all parties, including the Minister, and it became apparent that people treading the same path were in danger of tripping over one another. The Requisition for a Special General Meeting in a motion signed by 120 members mentioned above was refused by the Chapter Secretary on the grounds that the motion was not "legal and proper"—"a Chapter doesn't discuss ethical questions" and "This is a Federal Matter". Other motions of a similar vein were not allowed but by luck, an Ordinary Annual General Meeting was scheduled for 13th April. Again Mr. Gilling and the Council were criticised by members, for it appeared that within one week of promising to continue all efforts to get Utzon back on the job, they had resolved to drop the whole matter unless forced to reconsider it. Mr. Gilling's promise was made in support of his motion of confidence and came as the culmination of his summing up prior to voting—possibly a good reason why many voted for the Council. How, one wonders, do these same voters feel now? Again there is no point in reporting the meeting in detail, but the outcome was important. Mr. Gilling finally consented to a Special General Meeting to debate the retention of Jorn Utzon—This meeting was fixed for 27th April—fully two months after the original request was made. Two months too late—two disastrous months in the history of Architecture, in the memories of thinking people throughout Australia and the world, and last and probably least, in the life of the N.S.W. Chapter.

Moves were being made to heal the rifts, and Utzon's reinstatement, in the minds of those intimately concerned was not hopeless. Harry Seidler, Utzon's staunchest and most voluble supporter, and others, have appealed to the International Union of Architects seeking arbitration in the terms of the original competition. Many are also presenting affidavits in connection with an injunction to prevent the Government proceeding with the building without Utzon in control. Finally Alan Gamble, who emerged as the man most likely to unite all factions, and one or two others with a little political acumen, were negotiating conferences between parties who will still talk to each other in an effort to hold open the door and keep reason prevailing. These men are no fools, no young hotheads — they are the men who are shaping the future environment of this country and the world. Their time is money, too. Mr. Hughes and Mr. Gilling have steered well-intentioned but tragically misguided courses. No thinking architect can fence-sit throughout such a catastrophe.

¶ The following letter to the Editor of Cross-Section, from Michael Lewis, principal in charge of the Sydney office of Ove Arup & Partners, consulting engineers, was received: "Dear Sir, We have read the 'extraordinary issue' of Cross-Section which you forwarded to us. We fully understand your desire to see the Sydney Opera House completed in the spirit and quality of its original conception but we must point out that there are a number of statements in your article which are inaccurate and misleading and are damaging to our reputation. The first statement to which we refer is that this firm, as the Consulting Structural Engineers on the Opera House project, had questioned the feasibility of the plywood auditoria structure as designed by Mr. Utzon but had later withdrawn its criticisms. The facts are:—

- a) This firm in the course of its duties prepared a report on Mr. Utzon's proposal for the ceiling of one of the auditoria. The report demonstrated that the scheme required substantial modification in order to make it practicable and recommended an alternative method of achieving the same result using a different structural method.
- b) We submitted a report to Mr. Utzon for his consideration and suggested discussing it with him in the hope that agreement could be reached before it was forwarded to the Minister.
- c) Mr. Utzon did not discuss the report with us but sent it to the Minister with the comment that he was unable to accept it.
- d) On learning from him that he had done so, we wrote to the Minister asking that he defer consideration of the report until we had had a chance to reach agreement with Mr. Utzon on the matters dealt with in it.
- e) We have not at any time withdrawn our criticisms of Mr. Utzon's proposals, and we adhere to our recommendations.

The clear implication in your statement that we made criticisms of Mr. Utzon's designs and later withdrew them as unjustified is a damaging reflection on this firm's competence. The next statement to which we object is under the heading 'Stage Two — Contracts administered by Utzon'. It is as follows:—

'4. Original £1.8 million estimate for shells has risen to £5.6 million under a cost plus contract administered by Ove Arup & Partners. The lid erection contract has risen by £70,000 because of the failure to test the technique with prototypes. Utzon's request for prototype testing was ignored'.

These statements are inaccurate, incomplete and misleading. The facts are:—

- a) Before they were awarded the contract for the erection of the shells, the Contractors, M. R. Hornibrook (N.S.W.) Pty. Ltd., made (on the 23rd March, 1962) a preliminary estimate of £1.87 million. In July, 1962, again before the contract was entered into, they revised their estimate to £2.28 million.
- b) Work under the contract began in March, 1963.
- c) In July, 1963, the Contractor and this firm made a new estimate at £2.63 million, and a subsequent estimate on the 16th April, 1964, placed the cost at £3.52 million.
- d) The latest estimate of the cost of the construction of the shells was made on 14th July, 1965, and is for £3.83 million.
- e) In addition, there will be payments in excess of £1 million due to Hornibrook's in respects of items of work brought in to their contract from Stage I and Stage III, which are separate and unconnected with the erection of the shells.

This refers to items such as stage towers, basements, waterproofing, etc.

- f) There is no separate contract for the tile lid erection: it is part of Hornibrook's contract. It is estimated that the cost of it will be about £70,000 above the previous estimate, and the increase is due, not to 'the failure to test the techniques with prototypes', but to a series of extremely complex tolerance considerations, which are dealt with in a report, prepared by this firm, which you are free to peruse.
- g) It is not true that 'Utzon's request for prototype testing was ignored'. Many features of the work relating to tile lid manufacture and erection have been tested by prototypes. Furthermore, there has been no specific request from Mr. Utzon for testing the erection of tile lid prototypes.

Your article either states or implies:—

That the cost of construction of the shells has risen from £1.8 million to £5.6 million, whereas it has risen from the second (pre-contract) estimate of £2.28 million to £3.83 million. That the rise in the cost has been due to this firm's administration of the contract or to the peculiar nature of the contract which this firm adopted or recommended. The cost increase has been due, to a large extent, to the complexities inherent in the design. Because of the unprecedented nature and difficulty of the work involved, there was no choice as to the nature of the contract; no responsible contractor would have undertaken it except on a cost plus fixed fee basis. That this firm has increased the cost of the shells, particularly the lid erection, by wantonly ignoring Mr. Utzon's requests for prototypes, whereas the facts are quite otherwise. The article indicates your anxiety that the truth and the whole truth shall be revealed to your readers. This is not a particularly convincing statement in the light of the fact that you called on us during your fact-finding visit to Sydney on March 10 and did not attempt to check or verify the statements referred to in this letter. We feel sure that there was no intention on your part to cause damage to our reputation and hope that you will give us your assurance that this letter will be published in full in the next issue of Cross-Section. We would appreciate a reply to this request before 6th April, 1966".

¶ C-S replied to Mr. Lewis and assured him that there was no intention to damage the reputation of the firm of Ove Arup and Partners and regrets that such an implication could be inferred.

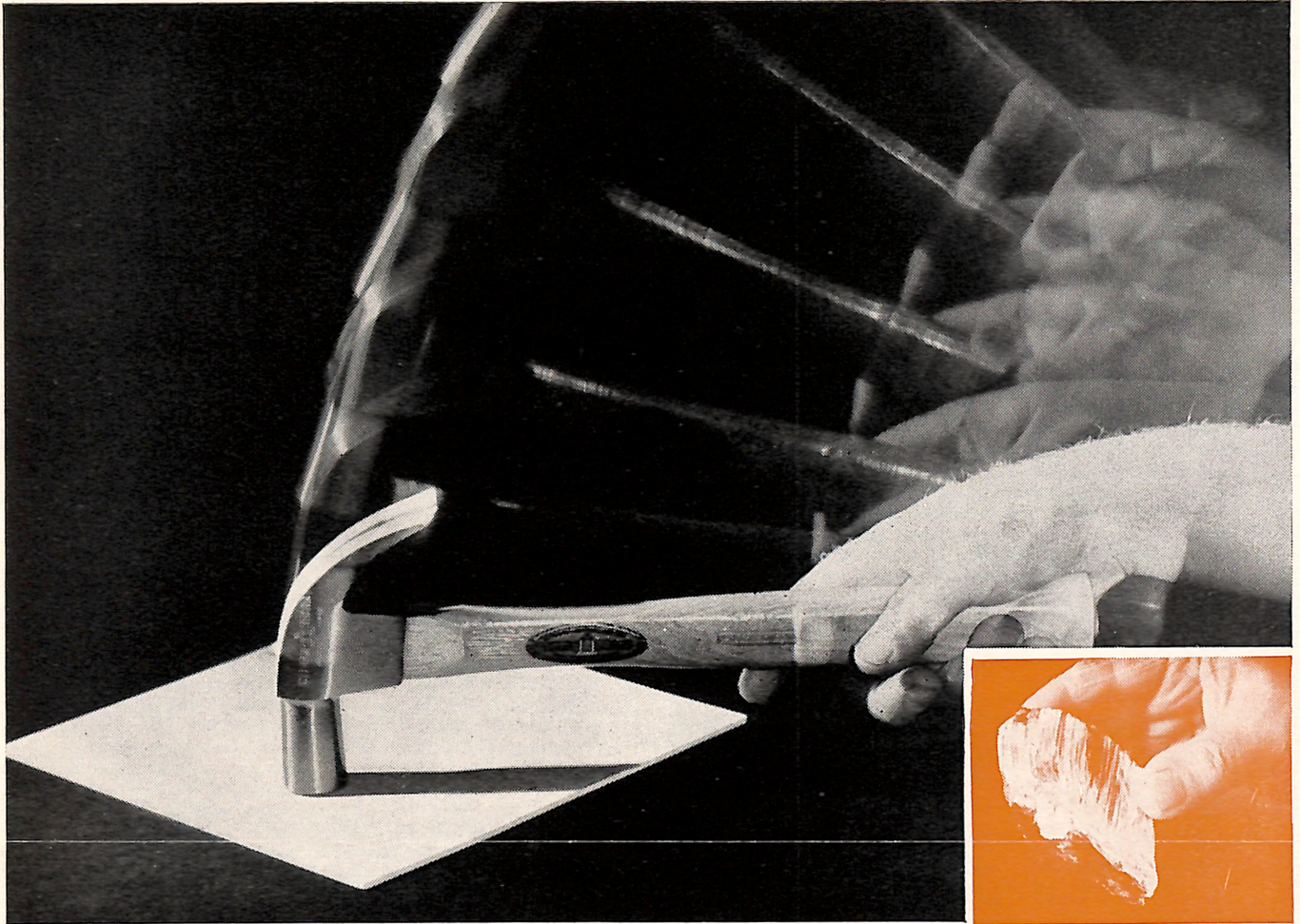
¶ Letter to the Editor: "Dear Sir, At a recent meeting of The Architectural Society (N.S.W.), which consists of a group of about 30 architects, consulting engineers, artists and academics of varied disciplines and which meets regularly to promote the exchange of ideas on architecture and its related subjects, the following statement was unanimously resolved: 'The Architectural Society believes that all architects should voluntarily refrain from accepting any commission on the Sydney Opera House, even if approached, unless a properly constituted independent public inquiry establishes facts which could cause this belief to be altered'". Peter Keys, Chairman, T.A.S.

¶ At the Special General Meeting, NSW Chapter of the RAI A on Wednesday, April 27, the following motions were passed: 1. It is the considered opinion of this Chapter that the Sydney Opera House can be built generally in accordance with the prize-winning design and can be a major contribution to the advancement of architecture only if it is completed with Jorn Utzon as architect. 2. That every effort should be made to have negotiations reopened between Mr. Utzon and the Government in order to find mutually acceptable terms for the continuation of the traditional architect/client relationship. 3. That the resolution passed by this meeting with regard to the Sydney Opera House be formally communicated to the Minister for Public Works forthwith.

¶ On Thursday, April 28, Jorn Utzon flew from Australia.

From Honolulu it was reported that Utzon expected he would be called back as architect for the Opera House within two years. In Sydney the Minister for Public Works, Mr. Hughes, replied that there was not the slightest chance of Mr. Utzon returning. Mr. Hughes said the Government had a very competent team of architects and was confident of their ability to complete the project.

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