

22.
PJA

PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP SPEECH AT THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS AWARDS (NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER), SYDNEY, 28 JUNE 1995

E&OE PROOF ONLY

Well Prime Minister's don't receive too many awards. There is only one is really interested in and that is the one that comes around every three years. But I am very honoured and very flattered to receive this.

I am very interested in architecture. I do have a bit of a fetish with temple pediments and things like that, but you all know about that probably. But that doesn't disqualify me from being interested in the environment in which we live and I have always been interested in beauty. I know it is a word out of the lexicon these days but it shouldn't be out of our minds because wherever we look, wherever our eyes may fall, it should be something which cheers us up, which gives us improvement in the quality of our existence, which encourages us to do things.

I am sure you are all run by your eyes and I probably am too. And, I first started to develop mine, pressing with my nose against Stanley Lipscombe's Antique Shop in Bathurst Street, Sydney - Stella to his friends. And Stella was very obliging in terms of taking people in and teaching them things. And Leo Schofield who is known to you all as another one of his students and there were some other mentors I had.

But it all, in the end, for me got back to architecture and to the history of architecture and to that I have been particularly interested. As you know my interest has been in the Greek revival or the neo-classical and we are seeing a bit of that happen around these days too. There's a bit of revisionism that has been going on.

One can take an interest in the development of cities and the way people live in the built environment. But I have always thought that the greatest challenge has been with the modern architect who with the disposable society has been stuck with the disposable building where we have had the mass congregation of people in cities for work. That is changing a bit now and probably information technology will change it more as we go on - where people will be

able to work other than in congregations, or in large capital city buildings, which are put up for amenity and for function without any real premium on their role in the streetscape or the cityscape and where they can be disposed of after 20 years and something built in their place.

It is a great challenge, I think, for architects to live in that environment whereas most of the people who have written the text books lived in an age where great public buildings were built or, if not public buildings, by private patrons who themselves developed architectural interests. There was a premium on everything they did as there was in most countries and in most cities and we have got a reasonable heritage in this country of them.

But as time has borne on, that premium has come back and you have seen it come back in public buildings. Some of the worst buildings built these days are public buildings - more is the pity - and that is changing too, I think.

But we have had our urban design taskforce which has presented a first class report to us about design in the cities and urban development and housing choice and these, I think, ought to be important things for us. I think we are probably entering a new epoch where a premium is going to come back on to CBD-type development, or precinct development, and this will give the interested patron, or developer, a chance to have an influence, a greater influence, than we have seen with the sarcophagi that have been ordered-up by provident mutual funds and other distinguished bodies who have not really been interested in what they have built, but rather the economics of it.

We have a very great country, a very large country, but as large as it is, given our strong urban configuration and consolidation, even this is not large enough for us and we are running out of space. The Premier's [Carr's] remarks recently about the sprawl of Sydney are a case in point. And, I think, another challenge there is for housing choice and style of our suburbs and the quality of life we offer people.

These are real issues, I think, for Australians because we have such a unique opportunity. We are the only nation on earth that has a continent to itself and our stewardship of that continent should be such that whether it be the coasts, or the native forests, or the river systems, or the cities, we should be now nurturing it as never before, understanding now as never before what a great opportunity and a singular opportunity we have been given.

I hope that the Commonwealth can play a greater role. We have never formally had much of a role in urban planning but through the Better Cities program we have been able to do some quite interesting things. John mentioned Pyrmont. Last week I was at the railyards in Launceston and that is a lovely city with a great architectural heritage. And we are doing things in certain locations around the country which will spark development interest around them just as Darling Harbour, perhaps as a typical example, has done here in New South Wales. The original public investment [in Darling Harbour] has now been multiplied many times over and if we can get good planning regimes and interested community participation, I think, we can really do some interesting things with Commonwealth funding in some of these areas and

doing it with the States and Local Government and bringing those three tiers of Government together and bringing private developers to it as well. I think this does offer us some opportunities.

I think we need to be very hard with developers. I don't think developers deserve to have many rights. I don't believe in leaving it to "the market" in the development of cities, or in urban development. I think there has to be always the predominant public interest question prevailing and, therefore, we should encourage developers but we should encourage them within frameworks which we as a community endorse and not to be held hostage to the things that they propose to us.

Mr Grollo's proposal for the new hundred storey-odd building in Melbourne is an example of what we shouldn't be doing or what we shouldn't tolerate.

So to the extent that I can say some things about this, or add to the commonweal, to put a premium on architecture, to put a premium on the creativity of people whose profession it is to think about the sort of buildings we build, the way we live in them, those who occupy them, and those who have to look at them and the environment in which they sit, these are the things, I think, that Government's perhaps can do - perhaps at a distance in some respects - but where we do have an influence ourselves, encourage the best things to happen if it is at all possible.

At any rate, I suppose in many respects, the Sydney Morning Herald has described me as a frustrated State planning minister - but then the Sydney Morning Herald has described me in many ways - the truth is there may be a grain of truth in that.

At any rate, I am not going to - while ever the wrath of democracy leaves me standing - I am not going to desist from arguing the case for good urban design and thoughtful development of our landscape, of our coasts, of keeping our eyes sharply on that great inheritance we have been given. If that helps this profession I would be very pleased indeed. But I am very honoured by the fact that you have thought it might have already. Thank you.

ends