

MONDAY, JULY 29, 1974

Impeachment

IT COMES as a relief, and not just to Americans, that the judiciary committee of the US House of Representatives has at last set in motion the formal processes which must decide, within a few months, whether President Nixon will be impeached and, possibly, removed from office. There has been so much confusion and indecision that the judiciary committee's vote on one article of impeachment, 27-11 against the President, can only be welcomed. Like the US Supreme Court's judgment on the 64 Watergate tapes, it clears the air and rules out further delay. For it is the protracted nature of the Watergate scandal which, in the 18 months of Mr Nixon's second term, has sapped American morale.

That loss of morale has called into question the very political stability of the United States and, just as importantly, has affected its capacity to take its proper place in international negotiations. (The failure of the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting in Moscow to produce more than marginally useful results was due, of course, to the uncertainty of the President's position; neither the Russian nor the American leader could be sure whether Mr Nixon would remain in office or retain his ability to make any important commitments.) The significance of the judiciary committee's vote, therefore, is that it is the first step on the road towards an early final resolution of the painful scandal.

Today or tomorrow, the committee may decide to add further articles of impeachment; but the one it has already approved is enough to set the inexorable machinery going. The 27-11 vote was significant, however, in another respect; it had a strong bi-partisan element. Six members of Mr Nixon's own party voted in favour of the article of impeachment. This in itself must have a strong persuasive effect when the full, 435-member

House of Representatives votes on impeachment, probably on August 23. The fact that conservative southern Democrat members of the committee made strong "law and order" speeches may also harden the attitude of other, similar congressmen who have had reservations.

Of course, the judiciary committee's vote came as no surprise, least of all to Mr Nixon, after the tone of recent debates; doubtless its Democratic members had a keen eye to the main political chance. But the fact that they were joined by six Republicans not only makes it probable that the House of Representatives will send articles of impeachment to the Senate for trial but makes the President's position in the Senate more difficult. Until now it has seemed likely that, if it comes to the point, he will win an acquittal in the Senate because his opponents will not be able to muster the necessary two-thirds majority. The question now is whether he can preserve his existing support.

The President and his remaining supporters argue that there is an absence of specific charges against him. Yet, inferential though it may be, there is now strong evidence that, in the committee's words, he "engaged personally and through his subordinates or agents in a course of conduct or plan designed to delay, impede and obstruct the investigation" of the Watergate burglary. And the committee's majority counsel, Mr Doar, has compiled a devastating list of repeated failures by Mr Nixon to take steps which he might reasonably have taken if he had not been part of the cover-up. The President's defence will still rely heavily on the lack of specific charges (unless the 64 tapes enable some to be formulated), but his back will be very much to the wall.

The dream reviewed

IT IS IRONIC that the Minister for Planning and the Environment, Sir John Fuller, should have criticised local government last week. He claimed that too many councils had shunted their problems to the State Planning Authority, which had drowned in a sea of local trivia. As a general statement, his claim undoubtedly has validity, but it does not hold good for every NSW council. Sutherland Shire has long made plain its eagerness to relieve the SPA of the burden of planning for the Kurnell Peninsula. Similarly, the Minister's comments sit oddly beside the attitude of Sydney City Council which, in the strategic plan to be published today, seeks formal confirmation of its dominant role in planning the shape of Sydney.

The new City plan, a review and revision of the 1971 strategic plan, marks an important stage in the council's assumption of that role. The document will become the focus for debate on the rebirth of Sydney, if for no other reason than its bold proposal that planned expressways should be replaced by two

north-south roads, each of four lanes, to move through traffic past the crowded heart of Sydney. The recommendation for reduced floor space ratios in the City, and the workforce estimates on which that reduction is based, will likewise cause considerable discussion. But it is the plan's reference to legislative action which is its heart.

The council's first step will be to assist the State Government's new Planning and Environment Commission in its review of land use laws, practices and procedures. It will also report on problems it has encountered in implementing its action plans and will recommend measures to co-ordinate City management. Stage two will be the preparation of a draft bill to give solid backing to council policies. Finally, a new statutory scheme will be drawn up and offered for public comment by early 1976. The proposals are seen as being "in accord with the NSW Government's stated policy of conferring on local authorities greater powers and discretions for planning decisions." Sir John Fuller should be delighted.

BLUEPRINT FOR AUSTRALIA'S FRONT DOOR

A new look at Sydney's master plan

By IAN HICKS

THREE YEARS ago, Sydney City Council unveiled a strategic plan, a \$100,000 blueprint for Australia's front door to the year 2000 and beyond.

It was not intended to be — and certainly has not been — a magic wand to change the face of Sydney overnight.

The City is still over-run with cars, pedestrians still jostle one another along crowded footpaths, the number of people living in the City continues to decline.

However, it wasn't all a waste of time.

Today the council will publish "Sydney City '77," a \$90,000 review and revision of the 1971 plan. The new document is a co-operative effort of the council, its consultants, Urban Systems Corporation, and senior State Government officials.

It shows what has been achieved in the past three

years and what the council will seek to achieve by the end of 1977.

At first glance, the record of achievement looks slim. There have been some visible improvements — Martin Place is the best example — but generally the dream of Sydney renewed remains just that.

Beneath the surface, however, there are signs of progress. The administrative debris of years of council neglect has been cleared away, managerial and planning structures have been streamlined and the first steps taken towards setting up a computerised data bank, vital for future planning.

Thirty-one specific action plans are being implemented, have been adopted by the council or are being drawn up.

The proposed rape of Woolloomooloo has been thwarted, with plans for yet another office-block jungle replaced by restricted commercial development and low-cost housing.

All of these are positive

steps. But the most important change has been an intangible development — the growth of confidence within the council as it emerges as the planner for Sydney.

In the next three years, the council wants this change confirmed, although rights of public challenge and State Government review will still exist.

The revised plan commits the council to the preparation — and submission to the State Government — of a bill to give legislative backing to its strategic planning.

The council will also prepare a new statutory planning scheme, to replace that drawn up by the State Planning Authority, and put it on display by early 1976.

In the interim, it will restrict high-density development in Sydney to the City's central spine — the area bounded by Circular Quay and Central and Macquarie-Elizabeth and George-Kent Streets.

In 1971, it was thought the workforce of the central spine could reach 400,000 by 2000.

Now, it seems it will reach only about 250,000 by 1985 and then grow much more slowly as decentralisation policies begin to take effect.

Because office blocks already built under construction or approved for construction will house most of that increased workforce, the pace of development in downtown Sydney should, at long last, begin to tail off.

These estimates have an important by-product. They allow the revised plan to suggest the scrapping of proposed freeways in the Ultimo area.

In their place would be a four-lane road, a direct north-south link, shown at left in the accompanying diagram. It would extend the Western Distributor to the Southern Freeway, either through Ultimo and Chippendale (the broken line in the diagram) or along the Darling Harbour Goods Railway route, over Central Station and on to Redfern Station (the continuous line).

On the other side of the City, not shown in the diagram, another four-lane road would be built extending the Cahill Expressway through East Sydney to South Dowling Street.

Large areas of land, at present reserved for freeway development, would be left untouched. East-West traffic would

use William-Park-Druitt Streets, Cleveland Street and Hay-Campbell Streets.

During 1974-77, the council will seek to give people a better deal in the central spine of Sydney. Broadly, the plan is for George Street to be given over to cars, Pitt Street to people and trams and Castlereagh Street to buses and delivery vehicles.

The Pitt Street plan is of great significance because it requires — and is already getting — the co-operation of Federal and State Governments.

The State Minister for Transport, Mr Morris, has asked the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board and the Federal Bureau of Transport Economics to report on the mechanics and economic feasibility of a two-way tram service along Pitt Street from the Quay to Central.

And he has asked the Federal Minister for Transport, Mr Jones, to provide Commonwealth cash to build the tramway and operate it free of charge to the public.

The reasoning behind the latter request is simple. It may be that the tram service doesn't stand up under the pressure of a cost-benefit analysis.

But it would contribute to the attractiveness of Sydney, to the amenity of residents, workers and tourists.

You can't measure that in dollars but, when all the jargon is stripped away, the rebirth of Sydney as a place where people want to live, work and play is what the strategic plan, 1971 and 1974, is all about.

