

Simple palliative

DR CAIRNS'S proposal for a Department of Economic Planning has attracted considerable attention, despite his own view that this is not the appropriate time to establish the new department. One reason is obvious enough. The Government has run into trouble with its economic policies, trouble serious enough for many of its ministers and supporters to believe that it may prove electorally fatal. A Department of Economic Planning is a delightfully simple palliative. Set up a new department and the problem will be solved. Of course, it won't be, and Dr Cairns himself is looking to a longer-term role.

To try to create a new department now is obviously impracticable and hardly consistent with the general guidelines for spending laid down for the expenditure committee of Cabinet. But if the Government survives this year, the proposal may become more than a plank in the platform. Dr Cairns has described it as the "most important development we are taking now." But it is by no means self-evident that such a department is needed.

Dr Cairns's complaint against the Treasury is that so much of its advice is a matter of resistance to spending on the one hand and neo-classical economics on the other. That sounds profound, but what does it mean? Bluntly, it means that the Treasury has been giving the Government unpopular advice. What needs to be determined is the extent to which that advice was valid and, if Treasury failed, whether a new department would do any better. In present circumstances, any department which is motivated, to quote Dr Cairns, by a "resistance to spending" must look more like a subject for congratulation than denigration. There is a constant need, regardless of the Government in

power, for a watchdog of public expenditure, and it needs to be powerful and impartial.

The suggestion that the Department of Economic Planning should play some general role (in the words of the new platform, "determine medium- and long-term priorities and co-ordinate all Australian Government economic and social programs") is really a confession of the inability of the Cabinet to play what is, after all, its role. Cabinet is the body that should be setting out priorities and co-ordinating programs. Until and unless it can do so, no amount of new departments will help it. The Government's experience with the Priorities Review Staff should be evidence enough of that. Mr Harold Wilson could also give the Government a few words of bitter experience on the matter.

Treasury's performance over 1974 has not been a matter for particular congratulation, and its forecasts have proved embarrassingly inaccurate for the Government. But the failure has basically been a refusal to provide a series of options. Instead, Treasury has consistently presented allegedly infallible policies, and has not been prepared to acknowledge the very real differences that exist within the ranks of the Government's Public Service advisers — for example, between the Reserve Bank and Treasury. The need is to reform the present channels of advice and the excessive dominance of Treasury over the flow of advice reaching the Government. The Economic Council, which met at the weekend, is one sensible response. But a new Department of Economic Planning is not going to solve any problems. Instead it is likely to create some, in that the circumstances of its creation suggest it would be a highly political department with all the consequences this implies.

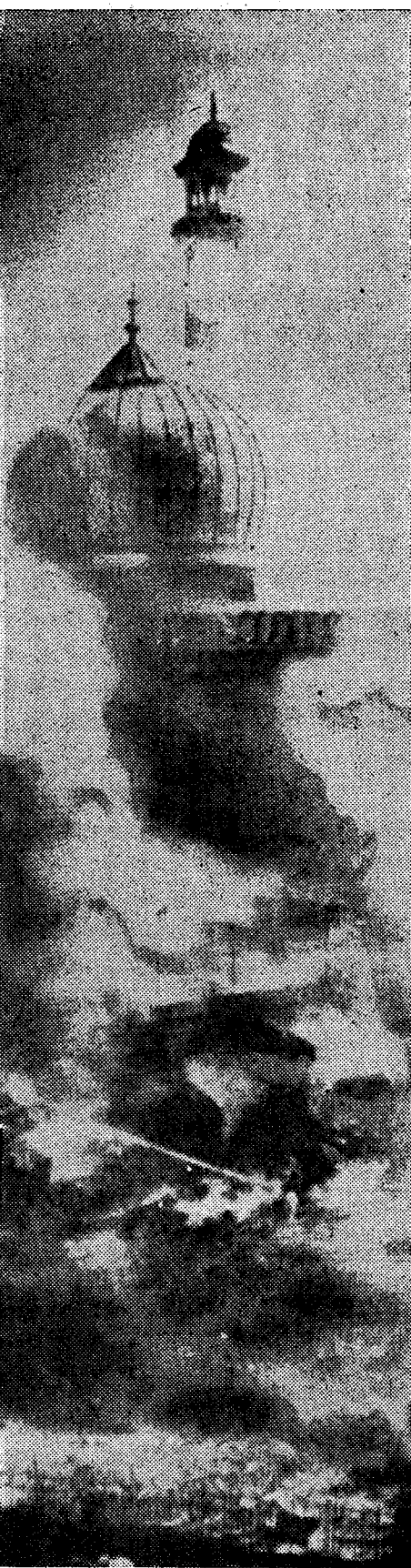
Implementing the dream

SYDNEY City Council went back to work yesterday, its 20 aldermen refreshed, presumably, by their summer break. Nobody will begrudge them the holiday; indeed, every Sydneysider should hope they made the most of it because the year ahead is a challenging one. It is clear that 1975 will determine whether Australia's premier city begins to realise its obvious potential or is left to languish in a limbo of past mistakes. That planning errors have been made is obvious enough to everyone who lives or works in Sydney or comes here as a tourist. The resident, the commuter and the visitor must all contend with the horrors of City traffic and its inadequate provision for the pedestrian. All have cause to mourn the insufficiency of green oases and open air facilities in a City whose climate provides so many opportunities for the use of both.

In its six years of control at the Town Hall, the Civic Reform Group has worked hard to identify the myriad faults of modern Sydney. It has produced the Sydney Strategic Plan, last year's review of that strategy and more than a score of

action plans setting out details of specific projects to improve Sydney's amenity. While some of the plans have been implemented, a good many are no more than paper visions, far from realisation. If the first two terms of Civic Reform administration are to be seen as a time to think and plan, then its third term must be the time for action.

Alderman Briger, whose chairmanship of the City Development Committee makes him a key figure in this area, recognises the need for action now. He has spoken of a task force to program the progressive implementation of past planning. Given the complexity of change in a bustling City, that is probably a good idea but the responsibility for action lies at Civic Reform's door. It will be judged on how it discharges that responsibility at the next local government election when, unless the State Government changes its mind, Civic Reform faces the possibility of a strong Labor challenge as a result of a return to compulsory voting. But the greater challenge will be to show every Sydneysider that the past six years' waiting has been worthwhile.



UPI satellite picture
of mosque during the Moslem riot.

8 die in riot after Moslem leader held

NEW DELHI, Monday. — At least eight people were killed and about 100 injured in a clash between police and crowds protesting over the arrest of a Moslem religious leader yesterday.

It was one of the most serious disturbances in the capital for years.

Police opened fire and used tear gas to disperse crowds who had set fire to a police post and shops and vehicles around Delhi's most important mosque, the Jama Masjid.

More than 60 policemen were among the injured.

About 200 people were arrested and a 48-hour curfew was clamped on the area around the mosque.

Six companies of paramilitary border security forces were brought in to reinforce police patrols.

Mr Sushil Kumar, the district magistrate, said the situation was tense but under control.

Police said the disturbances began after a Moslem priest, Imam Syed Abdullah Bukhari, was arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act at the offices of a charitable trust which looks after Moslem property.

The Imam had gone there with about 50 supporters.

Mr Kumar said they were protesting against the refusal of the trust to recognise his title as Imam and assaulted several officials.

The magistrate said the Imam had been trying to incite communal trouble through his speeches at the Jama Masjid for the past year and posed a threat to public order.

(AAP-Reuter)

Heath's chances looking better

From T. S. MONKS,
Staff Correspondent

LONDON, Monday. — Mr Edward Heath's chances of retaining the Conservative Party leadership — for which the first ballot takes place tomorrow — seem to have improved.

A declaration of support has come from the party's influential elder statesman, Lord Home, and a public opinion poll in today's Daily Express shows backing for Mr Heath higher in the constituencies than for any other candidate.

The declaration by

Lord Home, the former Foreign Secretary and one-time Prime Minister, came as a surprise to many Conservatives. It had been believed that Lord Home had been more inclined to replacing Mr Heath as leader, preferably by Mr William Whitelaw, and that the ground rules for the leadership contest, which Lord Home formulated, were unhelpful to Mr Heath's chances.

But Lord Home said last night: "Mr Heath is much the best leader we have and I hope he gets a good majority in the first ballot."

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Ethiopia's Military
Council announced the
nationalisation of all
food, textile, beverage,
and leather industries
today.

The announcement, in
Amharic language

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