

Chief Mechanical Engineer's (CME) Building - comment on CMP, adaptive re-use, and commercialisation

The Sydney Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (Labour History Australia) welcomes this chance to comment on the Conservation Management Plan for the Chief Mechanical Engineer's Building (CME Building) at 505 Wilson Street, Redfern. We are beyond disappointed that public release of the CMP was so late, dramatically hindering extended public opportunity for comment and critique. It goes without saying that we appreciated the subsequent extension of time for submissions in view of late release of the CMP, but would like to know why it was not included for consultation last year as part of the package of other documents on the building.

On a positive note, we are glad to see that the structural and heritage integrity of this important and beautiful building is to be conserved, and we congratulate TfNSW and TAHE on this.

Our focus now is on the ultimate re-use of the CME Building. We note that the stated purpose of the CMP is (for TfNSW) to 'seek specialist advice to prepare the building for sale for commercial use'. We are appalled by this intent. With REDWatch we oppose sale of this public asset.

We acknowledge the commercial imperative for some retail occupancies, but this significant building must remain on the public books. It should not be sold. Ownership is clearly bound into any ongoing considerations of conservation, renovation and reuse. Retention by government, allowing for longterm leases (as with last year's consensus on the Clothing Store) is the only sure path to heritage protection of these assets and to ensuring any public purpose.

The nature of adaptive re-use proposals will realistically depend on the tenants, whether they be in the commercial or public spheres. We note that the Exhibition focuses on commercial re-use but we view this focus, apparently excluding public use, as disappointingly narrow. Given the historic transport manufacture and railway functions across the Eveleigh precinct, earlier discussions have proposed the establishment of a heritage centre somewhere on the whole of site: this centre would collect and display relevant materials not currently held by (Mirvac) the developer or with/ destined for NSW State Records. We hold that a significant building like the CME's is appropriate for such a repository, in tandem with other use.

Whoever the tenants, TfNSW and associated government entities must ensure that re-use guarantees public access, public and cultural space/s and conserves the CME Building as significant built heritage for NSW. Clearly the existing interior plan, with the minor adjustments and inclusions proposed in the Exhibition, and along with the Eastern Garden, can well facilitate public / commercial harmony. It is important to note that this building's location on walking commutes to and from Redfern Station, Sydney University, and within a vibrant

local community promotes awareness and ongoing public interest in its fate. That interest allies with the principles embedded in the 2013 updated Burra Charter, particularly in its stated principles of place, cultural significance, maintenance, built heritage, adaptation and use.

We request assurance that the CME Building will remain in public ownership, and that the call for tenancy will include full advice and insistence on relevant heritage criteria, setting caveats to ensure respectful and informed re-use.

Subsequent to this current round of submissions, we look forward to responding on the DA which must be the next stage in consultation, and which will seek approval of any proposed adaptive reuse.

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