

Remodeling of National Capitol Divides Institute of Architects

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Special to The New York Times

DENVER, June 30—The debate over the proposed extension of the West Front of the United States Capitol continued to split the convention of the American Institute of Architects here today.

A resolution presented by Maurice Ketchum, the president, to delegates at Monday's business meeting that would have placed the institute's 22,000 members on record against the controversial Capitol remodeling was hastily tabled following a brief floor fight and vote.

This afternoon, after two days of underground arguments and rumors of adroit political manipulation, a substitute resolution was put before the convention by George Vernon Russell of Los Angeles.

The new resolution endorses a bill introduced yesterday into Congress by Representative James H. Scheuer of Manhattan. The resolution would establish a Commission on Architecture and Planning for the Capitol to prepare a master plan for the Capitol Hill area. Such a plan does not exist.

The resolution provides that no construction or alteration of Congressional and related buildings could be undertaken without approval of the commission. Its membership would consist of three architects, a landscape architect, a preservationist, an artist, a sculptor and two laymen, to be appointed by the President, Congress and professional organizations. Service would be forbidden to anyone with Government building contracts.

Intent Clarified

"This is meant in no way to circumvent action on Monday's resolution," Mr. Russell said, and added that he would withdraw the new resolution from the floor if the issue of the Capitol building were reopened.

"That's a dead horse, and should not be flogged," he said. "It was a rude and tactless manner of interfering with architectural contracts that are a fait accompli."

The group of architects for the work on the West Front are substantially the same as for the East Front: Roscoe DeWitt and Fred L. Hardison of Dallas, Alfred Easton Poor and Albert Homer Swanke of New York City and Jesse M. Shelton and A. P. Almond of Atlanta.

Mr. Russell's resolution was passed with only two dissenting votes. He stated later that he

was surprised the motion went through so easily.

The convention has been sharply divided between those who consider it a breach of professional ethics to question a project already in the hands of other architects—such as the Capitol remodeling project—and those who feel that the matter transcends professional etiquette and is a vital national issue.

Official Attitude

The official institute attitude now is that it strongly endorses and urges prompt enactment of those bills that would establish the Capitol Commission.

The objective is to guarantee that any construction on the Capitol building or related buildings will maintain standards of excellence in architecture and land use, and demonstrate proper regard for the historical importance of the national Capitol.

However, a second bill, introduced at the same time by Representative Scheuer, was not acted on by the convention. This bill specifically prohibits any change other than restoration in the location or design of the West Front of the Capitol. It was ignored by the convention in the new resolution.

The general opinion of both factions was that officials of the institute had executed a singularly smooth political maneuver by acting as if the first resolution was no more than a professional faux pas.

Those who felt that the institute should take a stand against the Capitol project considered it a clever finesse of the real issue. A majority of the architects, however, were inclined to view it as a diplomatic triumph.

The \$34-million Capitol remodeling job, to be done under the direction of J. George Stewart, Architect of the Capitol, would be similar to the \$24-million extension of the East Front carried out in 1964.

It is being opposed by a variety of professional groups, including the Washington Fine Arts Commission, which has no official jurisdiction over the building, but has taken a strong position against the plan.

Objections are made on the grounds of violation of a national historic monument and the high cost of the new office space to be gained at the expense of the debated changes.