

The Dominion Post Tribute to a Wellington Icon 2007

Dr Roderick Deane

The career of Roderick Deane is in many ways a peculiarly Wellington story – a provincial boy who came to the city and made good in both public and private business arenas. Yet behind that glib summary is an impressive story of achievement which is probably unique in the business annals of New Zealand.

Deane first came to Wellington in 1959 as an undergraduate to Victoria University, taking up residence in the Baptist Youth Hostel. Although he had showed some academic potential as a schoolboy, his discovery of economics as an academic discipline was akin to the convergence of Isaac Newton and the apple. A stellar academic career including the ultimate achievement of a Ph.D followed, along with an equally important event in his lifetime of success – meeting his future wife Gillian.

So, with the 'Naki boy having joined forces with the 'Gizzy Girl' and 'done good' in the world of academia – what was the next step? For a budding theoretical economist, the Reserve Bank emerged as an employer that could not only utilise this exceptional talent, but also serve as a platform to grow Roderick's own formidable grasp of econometrics. Stints with (among others) the Bank of England and especially the IMF broadened and deepened his expertise, and his appointment as Chief Economist and the Deputy Governor at the Reserve bank placed him firmly in the midst of New Zealand's economic development. His Reserve Bank career was made challenging by his understanding of the limitations of and awareness of alternatives to the then current New Zealand economic orthodoxy. This culminated in his central role in the economic transition that was triggered by the change of Government in 1984.

Deane emerged as the man in the right place at the right time to assume the position of Chairman of the State Services Commission as the reforms of the 1980's became reality. The leap from 'policy wonk' to public sector leader is a large one at the best of times, and the mid 1980's were certainly not the easiest of times! Deane's ability to reform the SSC without total meltdown in the process marked him out as not just an outstanding theoretician, but a practical manager at the highest level.

Less appreciated but no less pivotal than his public career was the challenge that Roderick and Gillian faced bringing up their daughter Kristen who suffered from acute

Rett Syndrome, a debilitating mental condition. This experience led them to a lifelong involvement with the IHC, and not the least of Roderick's contributions to his country has been his role in this organisation.

After a term at the SSC, Deane was shoulder-tapped to be chief executive of the newly created SOE ECNZ. Had the fox now entered the henhouse he had in part constructed? This belies the vast inherent complexity of taking a public sector organisation and transforming it into a business entity in operations and culture. Once again, Deane was very successful in this hugely difficult endeavour – done against a backdrop of public unease and difficult economic and political times.

One last frontier awaited Deane – the leadership of a major public company. After his five years at ECNZ, Telecom knocked on the door. As New Zealand's largest listed company, with a bevy of hardnosed international shareholders, this was the ultimate challenge – and one that once again Deane met with outstanding success by any measure be it public services delivered, tax paid to Government or shareholder value built.

From management, Deane segued naturally to governance, and has served on the boards of and chaired some of Australasia's most significant companies.

He and Gillian have also long established themselves as active patrons of the Arts, supporting many individual and public endeavours, whilst the Deane Endowment Trust ensures that much unseen support is available across a wide range of human endeavour.

Roderick Deane has always been happy to let his results speak for themselves.

Tonight, the Wellington region speaks for him.

We salute and pay tribute to your enormous contribution to New Zealand's business world as a thinker, a 'do-er' and a leader.

Roderick Deane – a true icon of Wellington Business.