

'Tough guy' being re

Business Roundtable member Rod Deane is the new chairman of Te Papa, the hugely expensive, government-funded national museum. What's going on? **Anthony Hubbard** reports.

RODERICK DEANE is offering sandwiches and a lively defence of subsidies for the opera. He mentions the spiritual uplift that opera gives, and he looks troubled. He doesn't want to sound as though he's pretending to be a softie.

Certainly this is not the kind of language we have come to expect from the head of Telecom. Deane is a Roundtable businessman, a champion of the slimmed-down state, a virtuoso of the market and the mass lay-off. And yet here he is preaching the virtues of government funding of the arts. No wonder he looks unsettled.

"I'm like a lot of other New Zealanders. I believe in a wide array of talents in society that need to be built upon to give us a spiritual uplift. Investment in education does that, and things like Te Papa and the opera are extensions of that," he says.

Why, though, should the taxpayer have to pay for this cerebral morale-booster? Deane has preached for many years that the user should pay. Why should the consumer of culture be any different?

"My normal economic prejudices would say, 'Yes, let the market system work,'" he concedes. "But I think that there are some things in life where you have to make opportunities available to all.

"I guess as a society we have made that judgement with respect to the education system and the health system. And I'm not uncomfortable with making that judgement to at least getting people introduced to the arts."

The new chairman of Te Papa says the media portrays him as an economic purist, as Dr Death. His real position, he insists, is more complex.

"You have to be realistic. You can't put a price on everything in life."

About these non-commercial values, Deane is effusive, even eloquent. "How do we all

work together to lift ourselves above the ordinary? How do we facilitate . . . the sense of excitement about who we are as a people, where we've been as a nation, where we're going as a nation. That's what Te Papa is all about.

"And I think it's wonderful for young people and old and everybody to get that sense. I think we've undersold all of these things in New Zealand terribly. We have not been good at saying what we are and who we are and where we are going and how do we hang together.

"There's just been insufficient appreciation of our history, of our cultures. So I think to facilitate that, it's like a rugby game, it gives everybody a sense of excitement and a sense of 'We are a nation together'."

But, as he concedes, people pay to go a rugby game. Why shouldn't they pay to go to Te Papa and the opera as well? The sting in the question is especially acute for opera, which is largely a middle-class pursuit. Why should the government subsidise the well-off in this way?

"The thing that astonishes me when I go to the opera is the huge diversity of people who are there, young and old. The people who go there are opera lovers, not just the elite or the wealthy . . .

"You're asking me to give you a precise economic justification for subsidies for the opera and I'm not going to do that. Because I'm giving you a judgement call as a Kiwi, as a New Zealander, about the arts."

Although the government had significantly increased spending on the arts, it was still only a tiny part of the total budget. "I accept totally that this is a judgement about the sort of society you want to be. But I'm not uncomfortable about that. That might surprise you, but I happen to be a Kiwi to my fingertips."

But doesn't this put the Roundtable on a slippery slope? Once you allow non-economic arguments into the issue of government spending on the arts, why exclude them in other areas of the economy?

"I don't . . . Part of this arises because the media finds it's easy and simple to position people in certain spots, and you and your colleagues have tended to put me in a certain spot without realising that I'm like a lot of other New Zealanders."

Fans of Te Papa will be pleased to hear that Deane does not favour charging admission to Our Place. Not that he didn't think about it.

When he was thinking about whether to take the job, he discussed the idea with former chairman Sir Ron Trotter and chief executive Dame Cheryll Sotheran.

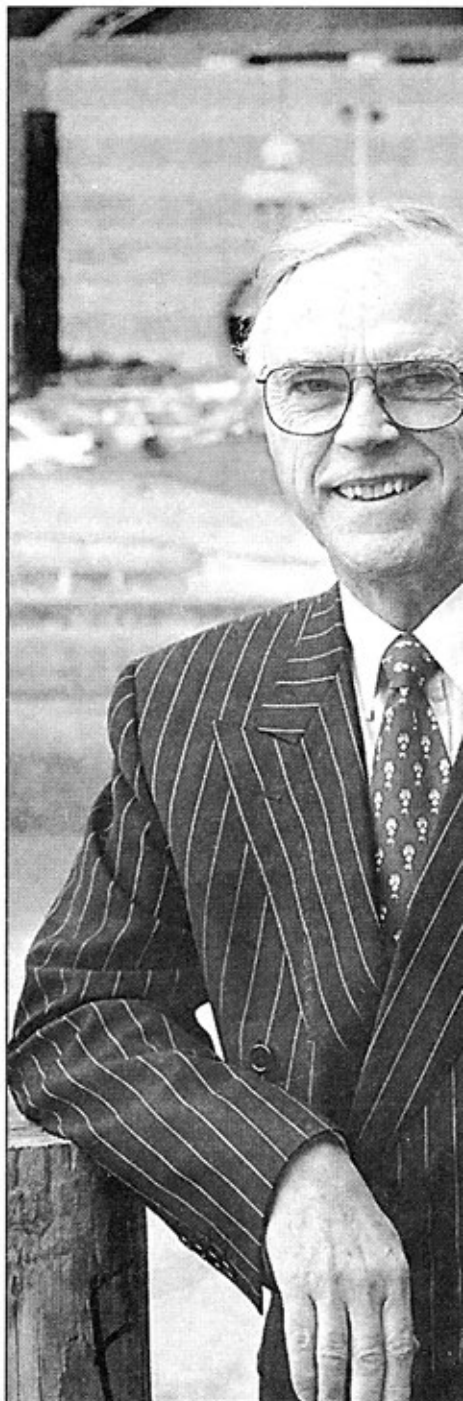
They convinced him that user-pays did not make commercial sense. Even a low door charge of, say, \$2 a head, could hurt the museum's overall revenue.

Some overseas galleries found when they introduced door charges the number of visitors "dropped off, in some cases very sharply indeed".

This in turn could affect the numbers who paid for particular exhibitions or services within the museum.

"I was a doubter for a start. I ended up being convinced that having admission free, but charging for some of the particular events within Te Papa, is unquestionably the way to go."

This kind of analysis - where you see how demand is affected by a change in price - was "bread and butter" for Telecom. He was impressed with how professionally the museum had done its sums. And in this case, says the economist - he has a PhD in the subject - the economic objectives meshed with the social goal.



The new chairman of Te Papa, Roderick Deane

Letting people in free not only made good commercial sense. It also fitted with Te Papa's brief as a museum open to all - "a most interesting congruence. Sometimes it happens", he says.

He was reluctant to take the post when the prime minister approached him.

He told her he liked to do

g realistic at Our Place



Kevin Stent

Chairman of Te Papa, Roderick Deane, outside Our Place.

only those jobs where he was sure he could deliver what was wanted. Helen Clark wanted more display spaces for the art collection, and more promotion of research and scholarship.

But after talking to the museum people and going through the books, he decided he could deliver. After all,

Clark was prepared to increase funding to the museum to meet the goals. And the museum itself was determined to meet her concerns "enthusiastically and willingly".

It might seem curious that someone as economically moist as Clark would want a super-dry running her museum. "She and I do have some

differences of emphasis on economic policy, it would be fair to say," says Deane. "But those were not the matters I was talking to her about."

What prompted the approach, says Deane, was his interest in the arts. Deane and his wife Gillian – both are well-known patrons of the arts – had met Clark many times at art galleries, at the orchestra and the opera.

He and Clark got on really well "and have done for years, because at the end of the day there's more social empathy than you'd ever guess". Their conversations about the job had been "very agreeable".

Deane came late to the arts.

"One of the regrets of my

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You can't put a price on everything in life.

school days is that I didn't take subjects like history and art and music more seriously. It was macho, a small tiny rural school . . ."

His wife Gillian introduced him to art and classical music, "and my education began". Fred Turnovsky, the great patron of the arts, "was one of my closest friends, and a very unlikely friend because he and I had views on economic matters which were poles apart.

"But we used to knock around together and when he died I was bereft . . . In his autobiography he said he thinks music is probably the finest form of human expression, and it certainly does a lot for me.

"But I'm not a connoisseur, I just have a huge intuitive commitment to it and a great interest in it. I mean going to the symphony – I'll be going to it on Friday and Saturday night, for example – is like a therapy, I suppose."

He says he is a traditionalist in arts matters, and he has had to change his view about Te Papa's more populist approach. "I love conventional art galleries, make no mistake about it. I've just had the good fortune to be in Madrid for a couple of days, and I went to four or five art galleries there. A gallery like the Prado, I think, is just amazing."

However, given that Te Papa had a brief from the government to introduce all New Zealanders to art, it had done so wonderfully well.

Telecom is a big spender on the arts, but here too Deane seems to have strayed from orthodoxy. The pure rightist theory is that public companies should practise good works only if they help the company. Anything else is a waste of shareholder's money.

This has the paradoxical result that companies cannot do secret good deeds.

If it helps an artist or a school, it must advertise the fact: it must brag. This is the obverse of individual ethics, which says you should do the good deed and shut up about it.

Deane admits that Telecom's sponsorship has "a commercial part and a social part".

The rule was that for every dollar spent in sponsorship, the company should spend at least one or two dollars in advertising "to give full payoff". Telecom didn't always do that.

But Deane is uncomfortable again. He doesn't want to come across as a bleeding heart. You don't do sponsorship "just as a self-indulgence. If you do it as a self-indulgence you'll go down the gurgler. At the end of the day that'll permeate all your other attitudes as well".

The perception people have of him, he suggests, is that "I'm quite tough. You don't get to be chairman of several companies, including the two largest, without people thinking you've got some commercial resilience. And New Zealand needs that to survive in the world. You've got to be realistic".