

## Journal Comment (continued)

There are many micro-organisms and other reagents that can be used in a percolation heap mode. This is particularly the case in southern Africa and our neighbours in Madagascar. The new Ambatovy nickel deposit is claimed to be among the largest in the world. There are unquestionably many multifaceted R&D opportunities forthcoming. The three additional papers in this issue from Iran and Turkey on aspects of open-pit mining are of relevance.

For this reason it might be appropriate to make some comment on the extensive consideration given to the patent and intellectual property rights by R.F. Taberer.

His contribution is intriguing in the legal complexities and ambiguities around the question of whether patent rights on a micro-organism can be claimed.

After some 60 years in technical research I have come to the conclusion that the easiest way to waste money is to exclusively back single innovative intellectual hunches. In the mining industry, a highly erudite statistical technique has evolved to assess probabilities of multiple sequential events. The most promising way to achieve economic success is the portfolio concept, in which one undertakes many alternative approaches to solving a problem or developing a mineral resource. One successful outcome usually pays for the several failures. Thus in planning major new developments one has to initiate many options.

For a country with a small science base, it is necessary to invite many participants, local or international, to collaborate in a joint portfolio effort and to contribute to costs and to share in final benefits. There are many resources in South Africa where a national portfolio approach is called for. Black Mountain, Gamsberg, Nkomati, and Barbrook are key words to mention, as well as many waste dumps of coal, gold, and copper, where multiple international options are possible. Severe confidentiality restrictions become necessary if one wishes to patent and impose royalties on every innovative suggestion, and this can discourage portfolio collaboration. Over-zealous patent legislation can do great harm to university research activities on an international front.

To attempt to make millions out of the improbability of discovering the 'super bug' that nature has taken many millions of years to perfect is symptomatic of an unhealthy greedy appetite.

In this issue, the award of bursaries to two mining undergraduates, Lindiwe Nyalunga of Wits University and Hlulisani Mabege of the University of Pretoria, is announced by Mining Indaba™, emphasizing the international collaborative goodwill that pervades the global industry. ♦

*R.E. Robinson*

## Meeting of International Mining and Metallurgical Societies

A meeting of several leading international mining and metallurgical societies was held in conjunction with the MINExpo International exhibition in Las Vegas, Nevada on 23 September 2012. The meeting was attended by representatives of AusIMM (Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy), CIM (Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum), SAIMM (Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy), and SME (Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration). This meeting was the second of a series initially hosted on the first November 2011 by IOM3 (Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining) in London. The aim of the meeting was to foster cooperation between the various organizations, to discuss opportunities for improving and sharing benefits to members, and to benchmark the institutions against each other. Discussions were held about the state of the mining industry in the various countries, as well as the structure and strategies of the societies represented. There was broad agreement that the societies would offer services to each other's members at member rates. Calendars of events will be circulated between the organizations to minimize clashes. The next meeting in the series is planned for 29 September 2013, to coincide with the World Gold conference in Brisbane.



From left to right: Bob Schafer (President Elect, CIM), Jean Vavrek (Executive Director, CIM), Jessica Kogel (President Elect, SME), Dave Kanagy (Executive Director, SME), Alice Clark (President, AusIMM), Drew Meyer (President, SME), Michael Catchpole (Chief Executive, AusIMM), Rodney Jones (Vice President, SAIMM)