President’s Corner

This edition of the Journal again covers a wide range of subjects related to underground mining. Safety features strongly, with topics covering the spectrum from the helicopter view of the probability-based likelihood of successful outcomes of the systems to the detailed design of rock support elements. Accident prevention utilizing advanced technology receives attention, as does the design and implementation of mining methods. The environment is not ignored either.

It is interesting to note where the papers come from. Three have their origins at universities, the traditional suppliers of research. All are from non-South African universities. While this indicates perhaps a lack of mining research being done at South African universities, it also highlights the ability of the Institute to attract contributions to knowledge from other parts of the globe, to the benefit of not only our own industry, but everywhere in the world where the Journal is read.

Another four papers are directly from practitioners employed in our mining companies, indicating that knowledge is not only generated but new procedures are also implemented in practice, highlighting the developmental aspect of research and development. The balance of the papers are from consultants and suppliers, all contributing to the public domain of mining knowledge.

The point I want to make here is that mining research in South Africa is not completely dormant, but that it is being done in several different places. It is good that development is still taking place, but looking at the long term, we do not have the coordinated effort and a long-term plan that we need. The situation is not yet completely hopeless, but we certainly do need a more coordinated effort as well as more fundamental research than we have at present. Without the generation of new knowledge at the fundamental level, we will run out of foundations on which to develop new processes and procedures for implementation.

Turning now to the Institute and its future, it must be pointed out that the Institute is expanding and the board has been replaced with fresh faces. It is hoped that this will bring new ideas and initiatives to the Institute.

The Government has submitted proposals as regards employment creation, and it seems the mining and metallurgical community must respond and obviously has much to offer.

Our Journal would be honoured to publish the economic and technical details of such contributions as they are developed for professionals worldwide.

There is little doubt that coal mining will continue for many decades. Now there is green-tinged sunlight at the end of the global warming tunnel spelling out carbon credits. This must be focussed upon immediately, if only for its unique potential for creating employment around the mining and industrial areas.

J.N. van der Merwe
President, SAIMM

Journal Comment (continued)

Two of the best and well-proven sources of hydrogen are bio-methane and syngas such as may be possible from the Beau-Ti–Fuel process and/or anaerobic digestion using plant and animal waste. These sources are neutral in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, unlike natural gas with its fossil origin and carbon footprint. The photosynthesis reaction is rated as one of the most efficient solar energy converter mechanisms.

But these are visionary concepts covering a large realm of nature, sun, sky, wind, land and water, animals, vegetables, and minerals. Pragmatically, they need quantitative and statistical assessment. Many are in progress, such as land restoration and water availability via effluent treatment, including domestic waste. But there is much still to be designated, such as what crops are best for biomass production in different localities.

A portfolio of projects has to be fitted into a strategic master plan to be tackled nationally. The Government has submitted proposals as regards employment creation, and it seems the mining and metallurgical community must respond and obviously has much to offer.

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R.E. Robinson

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