

Journal Comment (continued)

But inevitably, the uranium research bubble burst, owing to and initiated by the Chernobyl and three Mile Island nuclear incidents. Research facilities were downgraded. Uranium plants were closed and the economic whizz-kids convinced directors that it was cheaper to buy guaranteed technology than to develop it yourself.

The pendulum has swung again. Beneficiation of mineral resources is once again the battle cry, now coupled to job creation and global warming. Innovation and entrepreneurs are the order of the day, and more university graduates are demanded for research.

This is only part of the solution.

Attendance and innovative buzzwords in PowerPoint presentations at summit conferences are not the answer.

Well-researched results scientifically analysed, such as the papers in this issue, are what is needed locally, to move down the technology transfer chain and to mobilize an army of operators of mines and plants and mentors of technically trained marketers of international status. Technical colleges and teachers are what are going to generate the bulk of the personnel to produce the goods and services to justify the salaries of those creating added value and profits.

Long may the 'Crown Mines' Research quality papers appear in our Journal. May they never fade away. ♦

R.E. Robinson



This is the month of the year when we say that 'time is marching on' and 'we can't believe how quickly it is going'. Just a personal observation regarding the passage of time, with perhaps a lesson in relativity, is that I notice that the older you get, the longer the weeks become but the shorter the years.

The month of February was the traditional month of the Mining Indaba in Cape Town. As an Institute, we do not regularly participate officially although a fair number of our members do, some in their private capacity and others representing their employers. This year, we were there as an organization, albeit not part of the official proceedings.

The event was the meeting of the Mineral Economics Committee (MEC) on the issue of mine nationalization, which includes nationalization as part of the broader topic of state intervention in mining which also includes royalties, taxes, etc. The meeting, hosted and kindly sponsored by Investec, was exceptionally well attended by a number of senior persons in the mining industry. The Chairperson of the MEC, Mike Solomon, presented an excellent overview of the impact of nationalism on mining activity. This was followed by a lively panel discussion with panel members representing the individual authors of Mike's presentation.

This ran over into a workshop on the second day where the way forward was discussed. Even though the topic of nationalization has been de-dramatized by recent declarations by senior government officials (including a welcome statement by the President), it is clear that the issue of mine nationalization on the broad front is not dead and the dialogue needs to continue. The extent to which the SAIMM will be directly involved is still to be determined.

Our position is clear. The SAIMM cannot and will not take a position that is politically motivated or could be construed as being political in nature. Our members belong to a number of political parties and have diverse political views, and we respect that. Our participation in this very important debate will continue to be limited to inform the debate in a scientific manner and to provide a platform for exchange of scientific views in the economic sphere.

The MEC meeting was preceded by a meeting of the World Economic Forum. Thus far, Mike Solomon has been our 'representative' on that in his personal capacity, and we discussed the possibility of the SAIMM being involved as an organization. This discussion will continue and we will keep our members informed of progress.

The second matter I want to raise very briefly is our contribution to the National Development Plan. As individuals, we all have a role to play and I urge members to study the report, which is available at the National Planning Commission's website, npconline.co.za. The planning document is apolitical and sets a number of targets in all spheres of society including education, crime prevention, job creation, etc. If we as a nation are to contribute to a future for our children, it is clear that the status quo cannot be tolerated and that we have work to do.

The planning document refers specifically to South Africa, but the problems we are facing are fairly common to the southern African region.

As an Institute, the question is what can we do to contribute? From discussion at the February Council Meeting, it emerged that we are already contributing to the continued wellbeing of the mining industry by providing for the exchange of scientific knowledge in mining in the southern African region. Perhaps we can do more. It was decided that whenever possible, we will include sessions related to the energy efficiency of mining and metallurgical processes at all our conferences. We will also encourage discussion and exchange of ideas on improving the water efficiency of operations. How many tons of water do we use to produce a gram of gold or a ton of coal? What can we do to improve this?

There has to be more. Members are invited to participate in this drive. Please think, let us have your ideas, and let us see how far we can collectively contribute to the future of our region. Mail your ideas to julied@saimm.co.za. Nothing is trivial, nothing is unimportant.

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