



President 1994-1995

Looking back: Our Centenary Year—1994

John Anthony Cruise

1994 was a tumultuous year. It was our centenary year, and then came the first democratic elections in April. To our surprise we all came through unscathed.

1994 President's Message

'This year has been a tumultuous one for our members. Firstly, it was our Centenary Year, then came the April Elections and finally we hosted the 15th CMMI Congress.

To our surprise we have come through it all unscathed and can look back on the year past with pride and satisfaction. All the dire predictions came to naught and we are left with a feeling of accomplishment.

This is akin to mountain climbing. At the beginning the task ahead looks so daunting that it appears insurmountable. During the climb, a lot of strain is taken. But, finally, when the peak is conquered, there is a glowing feeling of achievement.

This glow is not long-lived because there is the slow realization the next mountain has to be climbed - the next accomplishments attained'.

Looking back

I wrote the above President's Message in the SAIMM Journal at the end of 1994 and re-reading it brings back happy memories of that time. What a year that was for the country and the SAIMM!

The planning for the Centenary Year began four years earlier, when in 1990, at the 14th Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutes Congress, South Africa was granted the honour of hosting the 15th CMMI Congress to coincide with our Centenary Year.

The date chosen to hold the Congress was April 1994!

However, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry - or in the original poem by Burns "The best laid schemes o' mice 'an men gang aft a-gley". How, in 1990, were we to know that, after the release of Nelson Mandela, South Africa would hold its first democratic elections in April 1994, therefore, clashing directly with our CMMI Congress? To say that there was much scrambling around to find an alternative date was the understatement of the year. It was finally decided to hold the Congress in September 1994. This meant that the President of the SAIMM chosen for the Congress would not be the person that it was originally planned for, as the office traditionally changed hands at the SAIMM AGM in August each year. This was remedied by making the Past President the Chairman of the Congress.

The Centenary Luncheon for Past Presidents

A Centenary Luncheon for Past Presidents was held on 24 March 1994 at the President's Room at Gold Reef City. In attendance were 20 of the 28 surviving Past Presidents (of the eight absent, five were overseas and three too frail to attend) so one might say that we had a full house of Past Presidents. When looking up the collective noun for presidents I found the one most applicable to the SAIMM was - a succession of presidents.

In his address to the Past Presidents, the SAIMM President, praising the group as 'cardinals' or 'wise men', reminded them of the fact that the very first President of the SAIMM was dropped from the list of Past Presidents in the Journal for a number of years because of his associations with the Boer War. 'He was also found dead in the veld. So, Past Presidents can be censored and worse!'

The first page I look at when I receive my monthly copy of the SAIMM Journal is the list of Past Presidents. If there is an asterisk after your name, then you are dead. The only two things that are certain in life are taxes and the dreaded SAIMM Journal asterisk.

Of the 20 Past Presidents who attended the 1994 luncheon, six are still with us today.

The Centenary Distinguished Lecture

The Centenary Distinguished Lecture was held on 24 March at the Convention Centre of the Sandton Sun, Johannesburg. The Distinguished Lecture was delivered by the Chairman of Gold Fields, Mr Robin Plumbridge.

He was introduced by Mr Peter Janisch, who used the occasion to summarize the achievements of the mining industry, and the role played by the Institute over the past century.

Mr. Plumbridge then delivered the Distinguished Lecture, which was entitled 'Mining in a global context - can South Africa compete?'

Whilst acknowledging the achievements of the past century, Mr Plumbridge gave a resumé of the current

state of the mining industry in 1994 against a background of the new political dispensation and the decline of the South African mining industry over the past few years:

'Given all the strengths of the South African industry, you will be forgiven for questioning the doubts about the future that are inherent in the title of my lecture. Since the great euphoria that followed the dramatic increase in the gold price in the 1970s and its final blow-out in 1980, the industry has been under increasing pressure and steadily losing its competitive edge. At first this was not recognized but, over the past couple of years, the industry has started to react.'

Mr. Plumbridge gave advice to the incoming government of what the ordinary man and woman in the street wants.

'In very simple terms, they have only two priorities: The establishment of law and order, and the provision of employment opportunities. The first is a precondition for economic growth, and the second is the natural consequence. It is imperative that economic growth becomes the top priority, thereby encouraging investment. Thus the government must be encouraged to adopt enabling economic policies and not control structures, which have been shown to fail throughout Africa.' As one African Minister of Mines said 'We have learned that it is imperative for government to get out of the way'.

In proposing the vote of thanks to the Distinguished Lecturer, Past President Dr. Robinson, picked out a few components of the lecture, which he felt deserved special emphasis, namely the Collegiate Culture, the Enabling Economic Structures, the National Priorities,



John Cruise, Master of Ceremonies at the Centenary Banquet

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Lip Service and Research. He emphasized the national priorities, namely 'the provision of job opportunities, which is second only to the maintenance of law and order. Without law and order, there can be no stable jobs.'

The Centenary Banquet

The Centenary Banquet was held the following day, the 25 March 1994 in the Ball Room of the Carleton Hotel.

One of the traditions which was established early in the life of the Institute was the Annual Dinner, which became a major event in Johannesburg's social calendar. It was always attended by people of stature in the industry and in the community and was often addressed by a high-ranking Government figure.

For the 1994 Centenary Banquet, the State President of South Africa, the Honourable F.W. de Klerk, was invited to be the guest speaker. This was to be his last official function of this nature in his term of office. A month later, on the 27 April 1994, Nelson Mandela would be elected as the new President.

There was a buzz of expectation around the Ballroom. The Banquet had been meticulously planned to the minute. Past President Ben Alberts of Iscor had drafted the speech for the President and therefore he had the honour to reply with a vote of thanks. Having drafted the President's address, Ben had his reply neatly typed out and therefore was confident of his delivery. We thought that nothing could go wrong. After all we were past masters at planning and execution of events far more complex than a simple banquet that we held on an annual basis.

But - all the best laid plans of mice and men...

We had decided that it would be a nice touch to have the Past President who was President for the 75th Centenary propose the toast to the Institute, thus establishing a connection with the past. As luck would have it, he would be speaking just before the State President.

To everybody's acute embarrassment, he became stage-struck, and instead of proposing a simple toast, he proceeded to give a monologue of his life. As the minutes ticked by, everyone was wondering where all this was leading. After 20 minutes and he had only reached the 1930s when he was a young mining engineer, it was clear to all and sundry that he was a bit confused about the nature of his toast and, that at this rate, we would be up all night. Eventually, after many attempts to stop him and stem the flow of his reminiscences, the Master of Ceremonies managed to escort him from the dias.

Next it was the State President's turn. He took the sheaf of notes which had been meticulously drafted by Ben Alberts, and said that he didn't think that after that long toast we would want him to read out a prepared speech (note that there was no tele-prompter for presidents in



Hugh Scott-Russell presenting the commemorative memento to F.W. de Klerk

those days), and that he would like to speak to us from his heart.

Where upon he tore up the prepared speech and spoke from the heart.

Poor old Ben panicked. His prepared reply was now useless and he now had to start from scratch preparing a reply whilst the State President was speaking.

The sweat on Ben's forehead was patently visible. In his mining career, Ben had never been under so much stress.

It is amazing how resilient the human being is. The State President finished his address and Ben delivered his scribbled reply. No one was any the wiser and the SAIMM President heaved a huge sigh of relief.

The next year I was asked by one of the attendees if we couldn't perhaps invite the Past President of the 75th anniversary back as he had only gotten halfway through his lifetime reminiscences!

The 15th CMMI Congress

The 15th Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutes Congress was held in September 1994 at Sun City. The theme of the Congress was 'Resources and Technology'. Delegates were exposed to the then current technical developments by means of 133 papers presented at the



The commemorative centenary memento

Conference of which 30 were on geological subjects, 45 on mining, 29 on extractive metallurgy and 29 in the field of metals technology.

In his opening address, the Chairman of the Congress, commented that 'The last decade has been difficult for the mining industry in general. Over the last six or seven years more than 140 000 gold mining jobs have been lost in South Africa'. He also stated that 'We have the resources, both human and natural, and we have the technology. Given the right economic and political climate, the future should be very bright indeed'.

In the official Opening Address of the Congress, the Premier of the North-West Region, the Honourable S.P. Molefe welcomed all the delegates from around the world to South Africa. He concluded with saying 'It is important to emphasize that the North-West Provincial Government is fully cognizant of the need to maintain business confidence at a high level which can be so easily undermined by economic indiscipline. In other words we want our investors to feel comfortable, to be happy and eager to do business in the province'.

The following Keynote Addresses were presented during the Congress:

- >> The South African mining industry: An overview by J.J. Geldenhuis
- >> Gold - the ultimate metal by R.A. Plumbridge
- >> Some future challenges for South African mining by B.P. Gilbertson
- >> Coal and progress: The South African story by A.B. Cook
- >> Diamonds by E.P. Gush.

The Official Closing Address was presented by the Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs, the Honourable R.F. Botha.

As the minister was delayed in arriving for his address, the Master of Ceremonies, in an attempt to keep the audience amused, quipped that the minister had appeared to have forgotten his appointment. There was a roar of laughter from the audience at this witticism from the MC, and he was pleased to have the audience in his hand, and was thus feeling quite proud when to his chagrin he saw that the minister had already entered the hall and was close to the podium.

The minister had heard every word!

And so, the joke was on the MC - the best laid plans...

True to form Minister Botha ignored the MC's comment and launched into a laudatory appraisal of miners, metallurgists, and the mining industry. A veritable tour de force which would be remembered by the delegates present for years to come.

Afterthought

1994 was an auspicious year for the Institute and South Africa. It is still remembered fondly by those of us who were there. Despite all the complications and technical problems, we embodied the SAIMM motto, and we, the capable, rose to the occasion - *Capaci Occasio* - 'to the capable the opportunity'. *