

Honour for Adriaan Louw

The Gold Medal of the Institution for Mining and Metallurgy for 1978 was awarded to Adriaan Louw at the Annual General Meeting of that Institution in London on 17th May, 1979. The award was made for distinguished services to the mining industry in South Africa.



Adriaan Louw, Chairman of Gold Fields of South Africa Ltd, who was recently awarded the 1978 Gold Medal of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy, London. Mr Louw was elected to the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy in 1948, and became a Fellow of the latter on 18th February, 1970.

The following are extracts from the minutes of that meeting.

Adriaan Louw was born in 1920 and educated at King Edward VII School and at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he gained the degree of B.Sc. in mining in 1947, his studies having been interrupted by war service in the South African Air Force. Shot down over the Mediterranean in September, 1941, he was captured and remained a prisoner of war in Germany until 1945.

From 1947 to 1953 Mr Louw worked at Robinson Deep, then moved to West Driefontein as mine overseer. Promotion to underground manager and then to general manager was rapid, and in 1962 he was transferred to the Gold Fields head office in

Johannesburg as assistant consulting engineer. While his successor at West Driefontein was absent on leave, an appalling incident occurred — the main crushing plant subsided and was buried when a dolomitic sinkhole opened up directly underneath it. Twenty-nine African workers were killed in the disaster. Mr Louw went back to the mine for three weeks to organize the resumption of milling operations and to plan the restoration of normal production.

Research had to be carried out to determine the causes of the disaster, but the immediate problem was to get the mine back into full production as soon as possible. The whole reduction works had to be rebuilt in a safe area: under normal conditions it would have required up to three years to plan and erect them, but, because of outstanding technical organization, the first of the new mills was turning within a year.

In 1963 Mr Louw became consulting engineer, in 1964 he was appointed a manager of Gold Fields and, after a short spell as an executive director of the company, he succeeded Dr W. J. Busschau as chairman and chief executive director in 1966.

Mr Louw's present or recent business interests included the chairmanship of West Driefontein Gold Mining Co., Ltd, and directorships of, among others, Consolidated Gold Fields, Ltd, South African Mutual Life Assurance Society and Standard Bank Investment Corporation, Ltd.

He was a member of the Councils of the Chamber of Mines of South Africa and of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, and was or had been associated with a variety of public bodies and governmental committees. He was co-author of the paper entitled 'Underground transport in the South African gold mining industry', which was presented at the Seventh Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Congress in South Africa in 1961.

A. Louw, acknowledging the award, said that he felt quite undeserving of the words that the Chairman had spoken about him. Many previous recipients of the award had expressed feelings of gratitude, of awe and even of humility, and he felt exactly as they had done. He remembered that the great comedian Bob Hope had been presented with a major award by the President of the U.S.A. for services he had rendered in entertaining American troops in the field. After receiving it he had said, 'Thank you very much indeed for the honour, Mr President . . . er . . . er . . . It could not have happened to a nicer fellow.' He did not think he could answer in those words!

An Institution such as the IMM would consider an award to be deserved by someone who had made a great contribution on the technical processing or academic side of the industry, with publication of papers that described new methods and, thirdly — probably associated with the first two — had made a contribution to the work of the Institution. He did not really claim any great efforts or praise in any of those three directions, so he thought that there must be a fourth reason that had influenced the thoughts of the Institution. He had been a machine learner in January, 1938, and so had had more than 41 years' service; there was also the matter of endurance — he thought he had endured more near-disasters than other people!

He was grateful for the award on another count — it was the second time in less than 12 months that the Institution and the Council had swung against the stream of condemnation that those in South Africa often had to bear, and that brotherhood of mining men had been demonstrated twice in less than a year. He was hopeful that any statutory reason for South Africa being the polecat of the world would be removed and that South Africa would be able to show members of the Institution the great advances that had been made between their last visit, in 1961, and the next one, which would be in 1982. He concluded by thanking the President for his kind words and for the prestigious award that had been granted to him.