

# SPOTLIGHT

## on the Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutions and the 1982 Congress\*

by D. A. Viljoen†

### Historical Background

The Empire Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutions was formed during the early 1920s to foster the holding of British Empire Conferences, and today is representative of the following Institutes:

Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy

Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy

Geological Society of South Africa

Institute of Petroleum

Institution of Metallurgists

Institution of Mining and Metallurgy

Institution of Mining Engineers

Metals Society

Mining, Geological and Metallurgical Institute of India

South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy

South Wales Institute of Engineers.

The first public suggestion for the formation of a Council that would link mining institutions in various parts of the British Empire came from Mr Frank Merriks, who, as President of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy, was speaking at the annual dinner of the IMM in 1921. The next two years was a period of considerable activity, culminating in the First Empire Mining Congress, which was held in London in June 1924. The Congress was organized by the IMM and the Institution of Mining Engineers, with the co-operation of other institutes. During the week in which it was held, a conference of delegates, including the Presidents of the appropriate institutes in Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Britain, met and resolved 'that the Official Delegates in Conference assembled, acting upon instructions from the Councils of their respective Institutions, hereby constitute themselves an Empire Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutions'.

Thus, the Council was born. A simple constitution was agreed, and a method of operation was established at this first Congress. Neither has changed very much in the intervening fifty-six years.

### Early Congresses

By invitation of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, which was duly accepted by the Council, the Second Congress was held in Canada in 1927. The Third was held in Southern Africa in 1930 under the auspices of the two constituent South African institutions. At that Congress, the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy invited the Council to approve a Fourth Congress

that would be held in Australia in 1933. This invitation was accepted, but, because of the rapid deterioration of the world economic situation, it was soon withdrawn. The depression was succeeded by a period of political instability that erupted into war. The Council went into a long adjournment and did not reconvene until 1943, but it was 1949 before the Fourth Congress was held — again in the United Kingdom. The Fifth Congress was held in Australia in 1953, and the Sixth in Canada in 1957. The Seventh Congress was held in Southern Africa — that is, South Africa and Northern and Southern Rhodesia — in 1961. The Eighth was in Australia in 1965, the Ninth in the United Kingdom in 1969, and the Tenth in Canada in 1974.

### Further Congresses

Thus, after the war, there was a run of regularly held Congresses for twenty-five years in the countries of the founding institutions. The only institution that had not been involved was The Mining, Geological and Metallurgical Institute of India, and their invitation to hold the Eleventh Congress in India was therefore welcomed by the Council. Preparations went ahead, but one matter remained to be settled. After a long delay, the Indian Government granted permission for the Congress to be held in India on condition that two member institutions were not invited to participate, and that nationals of the country they represented were not to attend. The Council was convened at short notice, and without hesitation it agreed to withdraw its authorization to the Indian Institute for the holding of the Eleventh Congress. This was a bitter blow to the Institute, whose plans for a Congress based in Calcutta were well advanced; but, although they had played no part in the restrictions imposed by their Government, they accepted the Council's decision with great dignity.

### Eleventh Congress

Having, perhaps for the first time, taken a stand on its principles, the Council found itself at the end of 1976 with no congress in sight. Appropriately enough, it was the IMM that came to the rescue. I say 'appropriately' because, as you will have noted from the historical outline, the IMM had provided the original initiative for the establishment of the Council in 1924, and in 1949, after a hiatus of nineteen years, the IMM took the leading part in its resuscitation. It was too soon to hold another congress in London, but the organization, exploration, and provision of risk capital for the swift development of operations in overseas territories are normal activities for many of the IMM's leading members from the President downwards. So, when the IMM proposed to put the Eleventh Congress into production in fourteen months,

\*This is an abridged version of an address given to the Welkom/Klerksdorp Branch of the SAIMM in August 1980.

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ten thousand miles away from home in Hong Kong, the Council accepted with alacrity.

#### *Name of the Council*

At a meeting of the Council held in Hong Kong to coincide with the 1978 Congress, which was attended by the Presidents or the representatives of the various constituent institutions, certain basic decisions were taken. The name of the Council, which was anomalous in that South Africa was no longer a member of the Commonwealth, was discussed. It was noted that the name had already been changed twice: from Empire to Commonwealth Council and then to Council of Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Institutions. No one felt very strongly about this. The institutions had come together originally under the same auspices, professionally they had strong ties, and, if the word *Commonwealth* no longer had any political exactitude, it expressed in its broader sense a relationship that still held among the institutions and their members.

At a subsequent meeting of the Council, which was held in London on 15th January, 1979, it was agreed that the title should be changed to The Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutions.

#### *Congress for South Africa*

Regarding the question of the type of political restraint that had led to the withdrawal of authorization for the Eleventh Congress to be held in India, it was agreed that it would be inconsistent with constitutional obligation, viz 'to serve as an organ of communication and co-operation between constituent bodies', if a congress was centred in a country in the knowledge that one or more constituent bodies would be excluded from participation.

Finally, having received assurance in line with this principle, the Council accepted an invitation from the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy to organize a congress centred in Johannesburg during the period April-May 1982. The Congress would be planned in collaboration with the Geological Society of South Africa, another constituent member of the Council.

#### **The 1961 Congress**

The Seventh Congress, which was held in Southern Africa in 1961, was fundamentally serious; in the main, the programme was dedicated to work and, at times, to strenuous work. But, to bring so many visitors thousands of miles without showing them as much as possible of a vigorous and controversial country would have been, to say the least, short-sighted.

#### *Entertainment*

So Congress was moved by road, rail, and air over thousands of miles. Movements were effected largely by night so that the valuable daylight hours could be used for the main purpose of the Congress; and, acting on the proverbial principle that all work and no play makes even the brightest mining man a dull dog, the main tours were planned to take in non-mining areas of interest during the weekends — places such as Durban, Cape Town, and the Etosha Pan and Kruger Park game reserves.

South Africans, generally, are hospitable, and hospitality knew no bounds during the four hectic weeks of the Congress. The result was that delegates and affiliates,

South Africans and visitors alike, were almost killed with kindness, with food, and with the enlivening products of the hop, the grape, and what-gives. As the days passed, one viewed with growing amazement and incredulity the amount of punishment that the human frame could withstand.

It can be truly said that, while Congress was a serious business by day, it was extremely gay at night and during the weekends. The delegates, with their women affiliates not far behind and urged on by the 'locals', did their best to turn night into day — every night; and the more they burnt the candle at both ends, the more they seemed to thrive on the experience.

#### *Breakdown of Delegates*

The breakdown of the 1286 delegates showed the following representation:

Honorary members	82
Delegates	819
Affiliates	340
Guest members	45
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Total	1286

The countries from which these were drawn were as follows:

Country of origin	Total no. of registrations			
	Delegates	Affiliates	In absentia	Totals
Australia	28	6	20	54
Canada	43	17	53	113
Rhodesia Federation	106	30	14	150
South Africa	537	272	5	814
United Kingdom	39	8	15	62
United States	11	1	25	37
Others	27	2	27	56
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Totals	791	336	159	1 286

#### *Technical Sessions*

The Organizing Committee, under the Chairmanship of Dr C. S. McLean, included four vice-presidents, an executive committee of 15, and three main sub-committees comprising 24 men and 15 women.

The official inauguration of the Seventh Congress took place on Tuesday, 11th April. The opening ceremony was formal and, by all standards, impressive. On a dais, backed by colourful banners carrying the national crests of South Africa, Northern Rhodesia, and Southern Rhodesia, and the monogrammed emblem of the Congress in blue on a silken field of gold, were the President, Dr C. S. Mclean, supported by two of the Regional Vice-presidents, Sir Ronald Prain and W. S. (Jock) Findlay, with the Congress Manager, Hugh Husted, acting as master of ceremonies.

It was decided that, for the special benefit of the visiting delegates — and also for many South Africans, the inaugural session would be followed by the presentation of a series of papers outlining something of the background of the country and its minerals industry.

The first of these, dealing with the organization and management of the gold-mining industry, was presented

by Mr C. B. Anderson, President of the Chamber of Mines. This was followed, after lunch, by three papers dealing with the economy, the geography, and the geology of South Africa, presented by Dr W. J. Busschau, Professor S. P. Jackson, and Professor T. W. Gevers.

A second day of informative papers was followed by two days of technical sessions. During the first week, visits to gold mines on the Witwatersrand gave delegates their first taste of South African technology and its hospitality.

#### *Post-Congress Tours*

Then followed tours that took delegates to the extremities of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Northern Rhodesia.

By this time, there were many who were eating, drinking, and dreaming Congress. Ken Ireland, manager of Blyvooruitzicht Mine, tells how he was awakened out of his sleep by his wife, Muriel, a tour hostess designate, shouting excitedly: 'Move up, move up: I've got to make room for eight geologists!' And when, next morning, Ken asked her what all the fuss had been about, she denied the story. 'Anyway', she added with a woman's logic, 'there weren't eight — there were only five!'

Early one morning, 350 delegates in four special Congress trains arrived in Welkom on the start of their Free State tour. Impressions included the following:

Nature, having buried her golden bounty deep down in the Orange Free State's sandveld, decided to call it a day. She left it flat and featureless with little fauna, less flora and no visible future. It was, in brief, the end.

That was before the advent of the mining man.

What changes have been wrought in the brief span of fifteen years! True, it is still flat, still sandy and its tangible features are all man-made or man-inspired; but it is vibrant and vital, permanent and prosperous, and as much as can be done to beautify a scene that is fundamentally unattractive has been, and continues to be done.

The eleven mines which have brought about this metamorphosis produced gold and uranium to the value of over £91 million last year. They have all been developed since the Second World War.

The four Congress Specials, three from Natal and one from Johannesburg, were arranged almost like a laager at Welkom station, with an information bureau in the centre. Tribute was paid to the successful efforts of the stationmaster of Welkom, who not only handled the four Congress trains but, simultaneously, managed to handle the trains full of livestock arriving for the town's agricultural show.

Despite the stationmaster's dilemma, the delegates to the O.F.S. gold fields were emphatic in their appreciation of, and praise for, the smooth organization and the magnificent hospitality shown to them. Bart Carr vowed that, on his return to America, he would petition President Kennedy to make application for the U.S.A. to be admitted to the British Commonwealth so that the next Congress could be held in America to enable him and other U.S. delegates to reciprocate the hospitality of South Africa.

#### *Anecdotes*

The many anecdotes from that successful Congress could keep one amused for hours.

It was a Canadian who remarked, after chewing reflectively on a piece of biltong for a while, that they also had biltong in the frozen north of Canada — made from moccasins after the fur had worn off.

Somewhere along the line at Tsumeb, in an unguarded moment, the visitors on Tour 6A were apparently challenged to a liquid marathon. No one seems to know

quite how it started — and few remember how it ended. What is known is that Buster Fowler, aided, abetted, and egged on by Allan Maskew and others, ended the night in the club swimming bath. It is said that 'they presented a magnificent spectacle in their white underpants at 2 a.m.', but a breath of formality was imparted to the otherwise informal occasion by Dick Banghart, who, fully dressed and somewhat involuntarily, joined them in the pool.

#### **The 1982 Congress**

The planning for the 1982 Congress started with an invitation to Sir Denys Roberts, Honorary President of the Council of Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Institutions, from Philip von Wielligh, the President of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy at the time, to hold the Twelfth Congress in South Africa in 1982. This invitation was formally accepted by the Council at the Eleventh Congress, which was held in Hong Kong in 1978.

A small steering committee comprising Kim Atmore (Chairman), Toby Antrobus, Dennis Toens, Charles Macphail, and David Viljoen, was formed to undertake the preliminary arrangements for the 1982 Congress. This group was in charge until fairly recently when, owing to an expansion of their activities, the serving members were gradually increased. Considerable assistance and encouragement have been provided by the Chamber of Mines.

As the last congress held in South Africa was in 1961, the Committee considered it appropriate that the general theme for the Congress should be 'Southern Africa twenty-one years on'.

Good progress has been made with the preliminary planning and organization of the Congress. Approximately 60 000 copies of the first circular were distributed during March 1980 to members of the constituent bodies of the Council of Mining and Metallurgical Institutions. To date, some 850 replies have been received (from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, the U.S.A., Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, the Philippines, Indonesia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zaire), and it is estimated that between 1200 and 1500 delegates will attend.

Offers have been received for more than 120 papers for presentation at the Congress, which is considerably more than the number required. The first task of the Publications Sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Alf Brown, will be to decide which papers can be accepted and to invite papers on subjects that have not been covered adequately.

The Congress proper will comprise three days of technical sessions and two days of technical visits. Pre- and post-Congress tours will take delegates to the far corners of the Republic and South West Africa, with itineraries that will include game reserves, scenic visits, and visits to wine farms.

Altogether some of the most up-to-date mining and metallurgical technologies will be on view, but as important is the fact that the delegates from overseas will leave with a better understanding of the nature of South Africa's problems. Perhaps they will not have very clear ideas on how South Africa's problems are to be solved, but they will follow progress in this country with a more sympathetic understanding than they have possibly shown in the past.